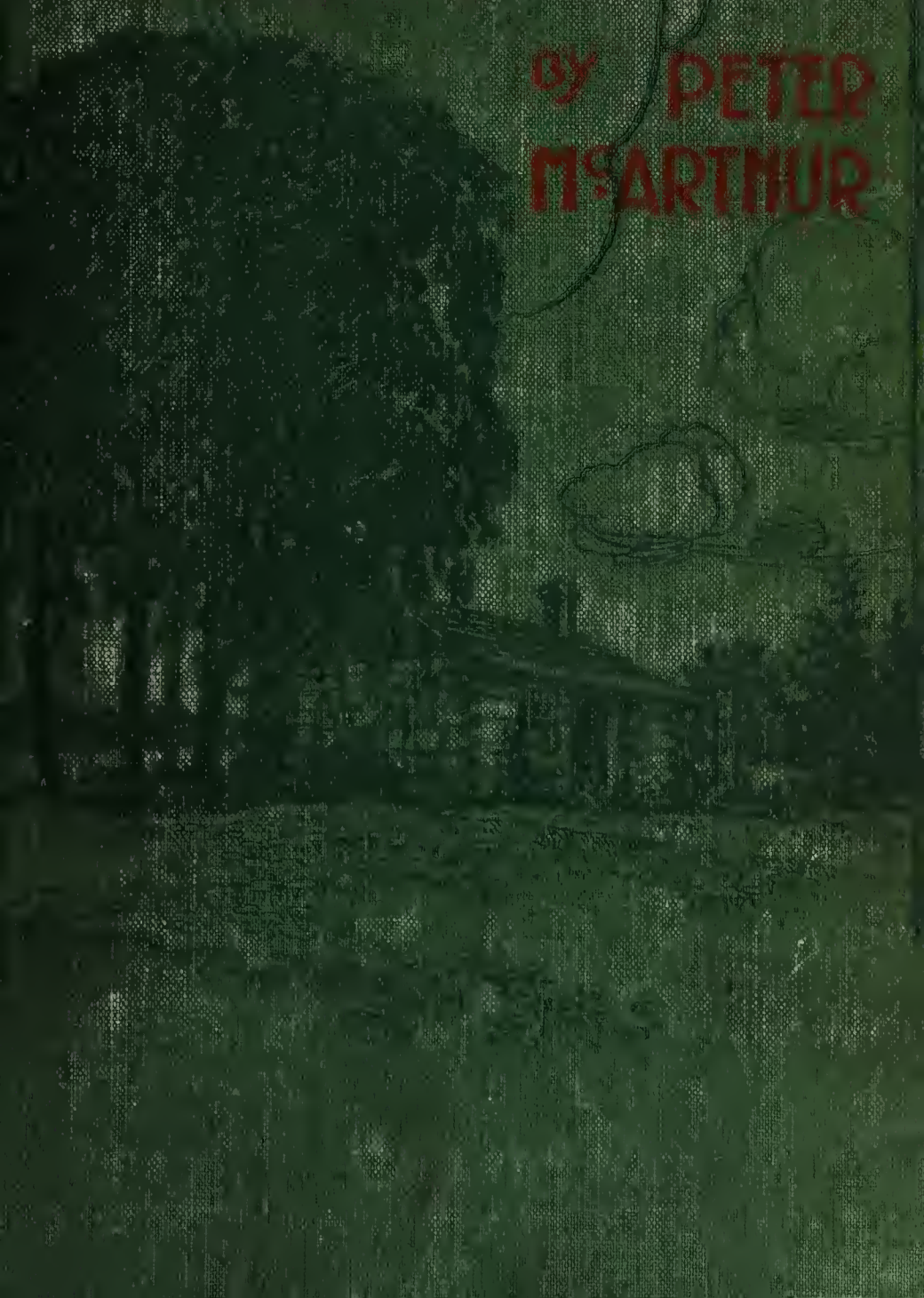


AROUND HOME

by PETER
MCARTHUR



NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE



TRENT UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

C.W. JEFFERYS

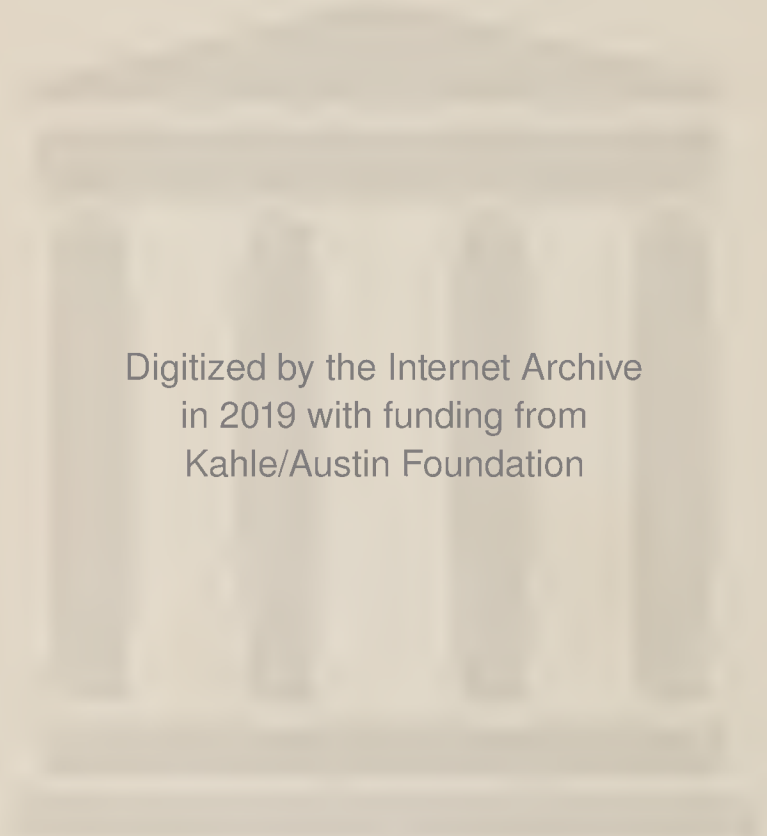
Spring



Summer



Around Home



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

Around Home

by

Peter McArthur

*Author of "In Pastures Green," "The Red Cow," "The Affable
Stranger," etc., etc.*

With an Introduction by

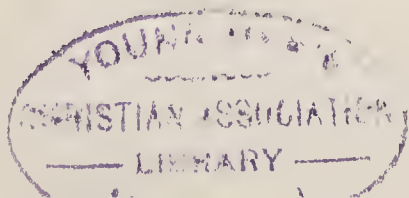
M. O. HAMMOND

and Decorations by

C. W. JEFFERYS, A.R.C.A.



Toronto: The Musson Book Company Ltd.



Copyright, Canada, 1925
By the Musson Book Co., Limited

Printed in Canada

Acknowledgments are made to *The Globe* for kind permission to reprint most of the essays in this collection ; to *The Farmers' Advocate* for the use of "A Fall Chore," and to *The Dominion Rubber Corporation* for "Why I Stick to the Farm."

Contents

	Page
<i>Introduction</i>	9

SPRING

<i>The Philosophy of Farming</i>	19
<i>A Perfect Day</i>	22
<i>The Decay of Yelling</i>	27
<i>A Meal in the Woods</i>	31
<i>Sunshine and Steam</i>	34
<i>Spring Relish</i>	37
<i>A Savage Sheep</i>	38
<i>Whittling</i>	40
<i>The Carefree Woodchuck</i>	44
<i>Fishin'</i>	45
<i>The Collie Pup</i>	49
<i>Impudence</i>	51
<i>Sunshine</i>	54
<i>A Song of Asparagus</i>	55
<i>Storms at Sunrise</i>	56
<i>That Cow-Poke</i>	60
<i>New Eating</i>	62
<i>The Ducklings</i>	64

AROUND HOME

SUMMER

	Page
<i>A June Reverie</i>	71
<i>When the Rain Came</i>	75
<i>Waldemar</i>	81
<i>Strawberries</i>	83
<i>A World of Life</i>	85
<i>Fresh Fish</i>	90
<i>Socrates</i>	93
<i>Our First Airship</i>	95
<i>The Solitude of Rain</i>	99
<i>The Militant Pig</i>	100
<i>A Berry-Picker's Conscience</i>	105
<i>The Mocking-Bird</i>	106
<i>Uniparous</i>	111
<i>Poultry Notes</i>	112
<i>How to Loaf</i>	116
<i>The Survival of Instinct</i>	118
<i>Burdock Leaf Days</i>	121
<i>Dog Discipline</i>	124
<i>Cow Reasoning</i>	126
<i>"Taste This!"</i>	129
<i>Enemies</i>	131

AROUND HOME

AUTUMN

	Page
<i>Mushrooms and Rain</i>	137
<i>October Picnics</i>	139
<i>Those Cows</i>	141
<i>Taste in Barns</i>	143
<i>In Praise of Celery</i>	145
<i>Autumn Odours</i>	147
<i>An Embarrassed Ram</i>	148
<i>A Burden of Bran</i>	150
<i>Masterful Mungo</i>	151
<i>A Lonesome Pup</i>	153
<i>Hallowe'en</i>	155
<i>Autumn Beauty</i>	157
<i>The Non-Extinguishable Lantern</i>	159
<i>An Important Decision</i>	163
<i>An October Day</i>	165
<i>A Fall Chore</i>	167
<i>Tinkering</i>	171
<i>Mungo</i>	176
<i>The Speed Hound</i>	177
<i>Handicapped Feeders</i>	180
<i>Why I Stick to the Farm</i>	181

AROUND HOME

WINTER

	Page
<i>The Wood-Pile</i>	191
<i>An Animated Barometer</i>	195
<i>The Christmas Tree</i>	197
<i>The Open Fire</i>	200
<i>Old Home Day</i>	203
<i>Lost Articles</i>	205
<i>Enoch Arden</i>	207
<i>Feather Clothes</i>	208
<i>The Wood-Pile Again</i>	210
<i>"Snow Stuff"</i>	212
<i>Shinny</i>	215
<i>Marcus Cato, Farmer</i>	217
<i>Barnyard Gossip</i>	219
<i>A Wonder Day</i>	223
<i>Kindling Wood</i>	225
<i>Winter Work</i>	229
<i>The Clothesline</i>	232
<i>In Praise of Hickory Nuts</i>	233
<i>Churning</i>	235
<i>Technical Education</i>	237
<i>Water</i>	241
<i>The Home Dream</i>	245

Introduction

“**A**ROUND HOME” seems to me the happiest of titles for a collection of essays by Peter McArthur. Home was to him the dearest of words. He abandoned the lights and companionships of Broadway to return to the simple pioneer home of his fathers in western Ontario, there to raise his family in quiet and simplicity and from thence to preach for the remainder of his days the happiness and wholesomeness of Canadian rural life.

When Peter McArthur passed unexpectedly to the Beyond on October 28, 1924, following an operation in a hospital at London, Ontario, there was a far-spreading feeling that a great friend and radiant personality had been lost. As humorist, poet, philosopher, lecturer and man of affairs he had entertained and instructed a widening audience for almost twenty years. He was known from coast to coast by his writings and platform work, and thousands who had never seen him followed with amusement the progress of the “Red Cow,” “Socrates” the ram, “Beatrice” the sow, “Bildad” the pup, and other titled creatures of the Ekfrid farmyard, whose doings he chronicled in his letters to the Toronto “Globe.”

Though the Sage of Ekfrid appeared to be immersed in the movements of the crows, the wild

AROUND HOME

geese and the coming of new live stock, such thoughts really engaged only part of his attention, for his capacious and restless mind ranged the whole world. He united in unusual degree the qualities of the receptive and the creative mind, and could fashion a new fancy as applied to the life about him, or quote by the page from the classics of ancient and modern times. He knew intimately many political leaders and his occasional visits to Ottawa were marked as much by long and deep discussions of the political outlook as by hilarity from the meeting of famous story-tellers. He was an ardent admirer of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and after the Liberal Chieftain's death, Mr. McArthur compiled a little volume of anecdotes and biography which preserves much important material. His contribution to the literature and records of his time comprised several volumes of biography, poetry, essays, humor, not to speak of the selections from his farm philosophy published in "The Globe."

Peter McArthur was born March 10, 1866, on the farm to which he returned to spend his later years, near Appin, in Ekfrid Township, Middlesex County, Ontario. His father, Peter McArthur the elder, and his mother, Catherine McLennan, had come from Scotland in the mid-century immigration to the new lands of western Ontario, and here the pioneer cleared the land and built the house of squared logs which remained the home of the poet-philosopher to his death. Gaelic and English were spoken in the little home, and the readings from the Gaelic Bible by the Scottish father helped to give

AROUND HOME

character and flavor to the boy's mental habits.

Peter was naturally an omnivorous reader, and soon found the banning of "profane" books a handicap. A chance gift of fifty cents from a man who was buying wood from his father led Peter to a London bookstore, where he bought a copy of Robert Burns, and there ensued many hours of joy while the volume was devoured in secret. Then came a feast of Byron, with the committal of many poems to memory. There was a small Mechanics' Institute library at Glencoe, and the forbidden sweets of this storehouse were made accessible through the connivance of a minister of the Free Church, Rev. John Ross. The minister later persuaded the parents to allow Peter free access to the library, and an orgy of reading followed. Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Adam Smith, Macaulay's Essays, Boswell's Johnson and other classics figured in this liberal education for the backwoods boy.

At twelve Peter entered the Wardsville High School and later the Strathroy High School. The latter course was made possible only by mortgaging the 25 acres of land his father had left him at his death. Here he became acquainted with Duncan McKellar, a young man of artistic taste and ability, later a poet of some standing, and the two were close chums until the latter's death in 1899. Peter took his matriculation in 1887, taught school for a few months in Caradoc Township, and entered the University of Toronto in the fall of 1888.

One of Peter's first acts at the University was characteristic. He became a leader of the Brute

AROUND HOME

Force Committee, organized by the "Freshies" to combat the hazing of the tyrannical senior classes. McKellar and McArthur now became still more intimate and turned their interest to the writing of jokes and poems which they showered on "Puck," "Judge" and the dailies of New York. Peter also sold jokes to "Grip," a comic weekly published by J. W. Bengough, reaping therefrom about \$2.50 per week, or the exact cost of his board and room. In February, 1889, he suddenly ended his university course and became a reporter on the Toronto "Mail." Here he saw life and studied affairs from many angles, but continued to write jokes. Finding them copied widely in the United States, he decided to move nearer to his market and settled in New York in May, 1890.

Now began the eighteen years of life in the world's largest cities, the first twelve in New York, then two years in London, England, and four more in New York before the return to the farm. He "free-lanced" for a time, selling his jokes and poems to "Life," "Judge," "Truth," "Town Topics" and other bright periodicals of that day and enjoying a bohemian existence among the "jolly good fellows." He was close friend of Bliss Carman, Charles G. D. Roberts, Richard Hovey and other rovers like himself, and they tasted life in many forms like bees flitting from flower to flower. In March, 1885, Mr. McArthur became assistant Editor of "Truth," the first paper printed by photo color process. In this position he did much to introduce a brilliant band of writers then coming into

AROUND HOME

notice, including Stephen Leacock, O. Henry, Harold MacGrath, Ellis Parker Butler and Duncan Campbell Scott.

Two years in London brought the honor of contributions appearing in "Punch" and the "Review of Reviews," with the formation of happy friendships and the ripening of observation and experience of life. Back in New York at thirty-eight, he plunged into advertising as partner in an agency, and with his fine originality wrote numerous pamphlets which were insidious announcements of business ventures in story form. It was profitable, but it was not satisfying, and it was not a full expression of Peter McArthur.

The great change of his life came in the summer of 1908; the return to the farm home of his father and of his own boyhood. He cast the life of the city aside and thereafter had little patience with the noise and bustle of large centres, for his love of the quiet of the countryside was genuine. He found his opening in an arrangement to write a weekly farm letter to "The Globe," later increased to twice a week. He won his audience at once, and his audience never left him. His neighbors laughed at the jolly stories of happenings on the little farm in Ekfrid and perhaps thought him a better writer than a farmer. City folks who had once lived on a farm renewed the associations of their youth, while hard-shell urbanites envied the happy life of the humorous observer of this countryside. It seemed incredible that one small farm could contribute so richly to the record of rural life in Canada. His

AROUND HOME

readers shared the delight over the arrival of a new litter of pigs, they enjoyed the scamper of the colts in the woodlot, and they felt the satisfaction of "tapping" the maples in Spring or of pitting the turnips when the frost came in autumn. The ever-changing seasons were reflected and glorified in Peter McArthur's humor and imagination, until the Ekfrid acres seemed a possession of each of his thousands of readers.

Here in this happy corner of a happy Province Peter McArthur lived with his wife, his four sons and one daughter. "Farming is above all a home-building occupation, rather than a money-making business," he once wrote, and he lived up to his definition. He conducted his farm, with the aid of his sons, but he spent much time in writing. Sometimes he wrote at his desk; sometimes in a tent at the edge of the woodlot, far from even the noise of passing motor cars and close to the infinite variety of Nature herself.

When at last his summons came, and the outpouring of regret in letter and newspaper tribute gave some comfort to his family, he was laid away on the hillside of the Appin cemetery by the graves of his father and mother. A genial October sunshine warmed and lighted the landscape as he himself had warmed and lighted the pathway of so many other wayfarers through life. Two poems added to the Anglican ritual, as read by Rev. William Willans, expressed the spirit of the occasion for the writer and friend so deeply lamented. The first was "Life" by Peter McArthur, embody-

AROUND HOME

ing much of his serious philosophy, and the second "The Grave Tree," by his friend Bliss Carman. Under a scarlet maple Peter McArthur was laid away, and friends and admirers eased their grief as they turned homeward with this assurance as voiced by his fellow-poet:

"Then fear not, my friends, to leave me
In the boding autumn vast;
There are many things to think of
When the roving days are past.

Leave me by the scarlet maple,
When the journeying shadows fail,
Waiting till the Scarlet Hunter
Pass upon the endless trail."

M. O. HAMMOND.

I. Spring



S. W. JEFFERYS

The Philosophy of Farming

THE possibilities of farming are inexhaustible. The other day I got a new light on the world's greatest industry that made me sit up. I saw in it a whole system of philosophy that may be formulated in actions rather than words. A really competent farmer should be able to make his farm as expressive as a book in which every chapter points a moral. His fields can be made to express the whole duty of man and the laws of rewards and punishments. He can provide for his own happiness and avoid the sorrows simply by taking thought when about his work. Please understand that this farm does not demonstrate the philosophy of which I got a glimpse. But some things that I did, while blundering along, serve to indicate what a purposeful and philosophical farmer might do towards rounding out his life and putting himself entirely in accord with the great scheme of things.

When I had this little flash of insight I happened to be loafing in my favourite corner of the woodlot. It is the highest spot on the farm, the top of a gentle swell from which I can see all of my own fields and most of the immediate neighbourhood. It was a warm afternoon and I had flung myself under the shade of a big maple to think things over and review my plans for the summer. Below me

AROUND HOME

I could see the young orchard—which shows a serious need of pruning—and the corn ground which is being worked to prepare it for planting. As the spot has been a favourite resting place since I was a boy, my eyes almost unconsciously notice any change. The first thing I noticed was a change that will, in time, cut off the whole view.

When planting trees three years ago I undertook to square up the woodlot, and the little pines have now made such progress that they cut off the view from a man lying down, and if they keep on as they have begun they will soon cut off the view altogether. When I realized this I felt an unexpected thrill, because the change is due to my own work. I had planted the trees with my own hands, and now they are a part of nature. In planting them I have made at least one contribution to the service of future generations, and it is not impossible that I may yet be served by them myself. I have planted many kinds of trees, and it is not impossible that some of the more rapid growing varieties, such as the catalpas, may be of use to me within the age limit of the Psalmist. It was a new thought, and it roused me like a poem.

The incident led me to review the various kinds of planting I have done since returning to the land, and as my chief relaxation has been the planting of things, I have enough material to furnish food for reflection. Besides planting five thousand forest trees I have planted over eight hundred apple, cherry, pear and plum trees, and made a permanent garden of grapes, raspberries, strawberries, rhu-

AROUND HOME

barb, asparagus. Although I did it with no formulated purpose, merely to satisfy a craving for planting things after the barren years of city life, each year will bring me the fruits of my own labour. I shall constantly be overtaking the results of what in a more purposeful man would be regarded as foresight.

This year the promise of the blossoms shows that I may gather cherries from trees of my own planting. Next year we may expect grapes, raspberries and strawberries. In two years the asparagus bed should be ready for cutting, and in the following years the plums, and early apples trees should begin yielding fruit. Each year should bring its fresh thrill of pleasure and all the while the trees already in bearing should continue to give an increasing yield. The necessities of life, such as wheat, potatoes and vegetables, we get by taking advantage of the recurring seed-time and harvest, but the luxuries, such as the fruits that are the best rewards of our labour, must be prepared for years in advance.

It is the same way with the poultry, cattle and horses. If we are to have these entirely our own we must care for them over a period of years, but if everything is foreseen and prepared for, a farmer can soon have a little kingdom that will minister to both his necessities and his delights. It is quite true that much of the necessary work of this farm has been delegated to hired labour, but the planting for the future I did myself and if all is well I shall derive the chief delight from it, for beyond the

AROUND HOME

material rewards will be the pleasure of feeling that I made the necessary preparations myself.

I can now see that if I had had a proper grasp of the philosophy of farming when I began, I could have planned my work so that I would now be enjoying all the possibilities of farming in this climate. But I am glad that I have blundered, as far as I have, in the right direction, and it is not too late to fill in the gaps in such a way that every part of the farm, garden and orchard shall show purpose and be as intimately mine as the page which I am now writing. It is possible for a man to put himself in every part of his farm, to make his farm a vital part of himself and to bring all into accord with the philosophy which underlies all Nature—the philosophy that forever allures and eludes the sages and poets. Besides providing a livelihood, farming offers possibilities of spiritual and mental culture beyond any other occupation.

A Perfect Day

NO ONE expected such a day as this. Those who have the hardihood to predict the weather, even in tempestuous, tumultuous, fickle March, hinted darkly last night of windstorms and rain, but, though their opinions were justified by past performances, this day began and ended as a day of days. The ancients orientated their temples in the hope that at the vernal equinox the meridian

AROUND HOME

sun of such a day as this would shine through the open door. The sun rose into an open sky, with scarcely a trace of colour, but there was a raw wind breathing from the east that aroused doubts. The roofs and exposed dry timbers everywhere were white with hoarfrost, and where yesterday there had been mud and puddles this morning there were ice and frozen earth. There was an hour of hesitation, and then the wind died down. The sun swung up grandly and began to give forth his heat. Presently the eaves began to drip as the hoarfrost melted. The heat ripple began to go up from the fences, and no man with a heart above a clod could keep from quoting poetry. Fragments of Swinburne began to crowd to my memory. His lyrical fire seemed suited to such a morning:

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain.

No, that hardly applies, even though it is spring-like enough. Let us try again:

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

That's better, but a little early. Still, to-day gives promise of it. Though this is good, we may find better:

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Maenad and the Bassarid.

AROUND HOME

Worse and worse! What have the Maenad and the Bassarid to do with a gentle Canadian day? If they dared to show themselves around here we would run them in—the shameless hussies!

But, though the poetry didn't come exactly right, the sap had commenced to run, and there was work ahead. Boiling down maple sap is the one occupation suited to such a day as this. It is too early for spring work, for there is still frost in the ground, and the most that the farmers can do is to get ready for the rush that will probably begin in a few days. It didn't take long to get the sap that was gathered in the last run boiling cheerily, and, as there will be no new sap to gather until evening, the day is one in which to loaf and invite one's soul.

* * * *

Yesterday there were no birds, and to-day they are everywhere. Many came in the night, and more are dropping from the sky every hour. The spring migration is on and music has returned to the woods and fields. The air is motionless:

No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feathered grass.

Every bird-note that sounded was clear and perfect. Bluebirds, with their plaintive whistle, seemed most plentiful, though every now and then a clamorous flock of blackbirds would go by, twangling and clattering their wire-like notes. Soberly-dressed crows seemed to be discussing politics in the tree-tops, and they cawed out their opinions

AROUND HOME

with as much conviction and emphasis as might any group of human beings. Probably they knew as much about it, too. Anyway, I felt like following my usual practice and agreeing with every one of them. They seemed so sure of what they were trying to say that far be it from me to dispute any of their statements. About all I was feeling sure of to-day was that it made me feel good to have the spring come back. Every now and then a woodpecker would rap out his love-call on one of those hollow branches that are all too plentiful in what remains of the forest. How like mortal lovers they seem—ready to knock their heads off to win a partner. My ears must have deceived me, but when a couple of plovers went zigzagging along the Government drain, they seemed to be screeching “Lookit-here! lookit-here!” instead of “Kill-deer! kill-deer!” Of course, there were robins, but though I listened anxiously all forenoon, I heard no ground-sparrow, and could not help feeling the loss, for its song always seems to me the best that spring has to offer.

* * * *

In the afternoon a fire of big blocks that could be depended upon to last for several hours was built under the kettle, and then came the walk to the postoffice for the mail. Woodchucks were busy housecleaning in the railroad banks, and all the water in the ditches was muddy with the work of the muskrats. A couple of times I put up flocks of blackbirds that were busy on the right-of-way

AROUND HOME

picking up long yellow grains of corn that had been scattered from the freight cars.

The walk home along the railroad was not done at a very active pace, for the air was languorous and the sun was pouring down summer heat. A heading in one of the papers caught my eye, the end of a culvert offered a broad, warm seat, and of course there was nothing for it but to sit down and read the news. Just as I was starting at the advertisements, a couple of meadow larks went flying past, uttering their swinging cry. That brought me to my feet at once to get a good look at them. They were not of those that wintered with us—I was sure of that because they were so noisy. New-returned travellers always have a great deal to say, and this couple was positively garrulous. And then—and then a song-sparrow began lilting in the distance. As I heard it, a warm glow stole over me, for I felt that spring was certainly here. Since then I have heard of redwinged blackbirds and wrens being seen. Really, it must be summer we are getting instead of spring, but still I am a little bit afraid. Still, to-day is worth glorifying even if we should not have another for a month. I closed it by gathering sap by the light of the full moon, and that rounded it off perfectly.

* * * *

I have a feeling that the Swinburnian mood of the morning hardly fitted the day, so here is something from Bliss Carman that may lead some weary city-dwellers to spend a week-end in the country:

AROUND HOME

I am sick of roofs and floors,
Naught will heal me but to roam;
Open me the forest doors,
Let the green world take me home.

I am sick of streets and noise,
Narrow ways and cramping creeds;
Give me back the simpler joys;
Nothing else my spirit needs.

Give me three days' solitude,
Sea or hill or open plain;
And with all the earth renewed,
I grow strong and glad and sane.

The Decay of Yelling

IT WAS probably a touch of spring or a case of association of ideas or of reversion to type, or something deep of that kind—but when I reached the sugar bush on the first morning of real sugar weather I wanted to yell. I didn't want to let out a dignified squawk such as you hear at political meetings when their are ladies on the platform, but a real primeval bellow that would compare favourably with

“A blast of that dread horn
On Fontarabian echoes borne.”

If I remember the old romances aright, Roland's final whoop was heard twenty leagues away. There was no particular reason why I should want to yell, even though the sap was running over from some

AROUND HOME

buckets. It was simply a deep illogical yearning for noise—a kind of wild jubilation over the escape from indoors and winter. Perhaps it was inspired by the trees, for I remember that the old-time wood choppers and lumbermen I used to know loved to rouse the world with sporadic yells that would start the echoes. But they were of a race that seems to have vanished from the earth.

“Glorious ruffians, bearded and muscular, scorning all softness,
Gorging and drinking and roaring with loud-voiced mirth in their taverns.”

But I didn't yell. It wouldn't do in a highly respectable neighbourhood like this. The telephones would be busy in a minute, inquiring what was the matter. I repressed the vulgar impulse—and probably some time in the future a psycho-analyst will have to be called in to unravel the results of that repression. Instead of giving myself expression in the normal way, I gathered sap and meditated on the decay of yelling in this correct and soft-spoken age. Men no longer tear a lung loose under the stress of deep emotion. Instead they write a letter to the papers.

Before the day was over I got over my yearning to yell. Gathering sap with two 12-quart pails and carrying it to the boiling pan gradually took the steam out of me. And besides gathering sap it was necessary to gather an occasional armful of dry bush to help along the heavy wood that was burning under the pan. Moreover the sap is entirely unconscious of our up-to-date labour legislation.

AROUND HOME

It knows nothing of the eight-hour law, and is never known to ca' canny. It kept spilling out all day, and I had to visit every tree twice before we caught up with the run. Two men were kept busy from early morning until night, and we were both properly tired when the job was done. But there was compensation in lugging two pails of syrup home across the fields. If one were looking at things in the cold light of reason it would seem that the proper time to yell was when we reached the house with our spoils. But there was no energy left for yelling. All I wanted was a large soft chair and something to eat. And when I went to take off the big rubber boots that I had worn while tramping about the woods I found that my feet were so swollen that a boy had to pull them off by straddling one leg while I pushed him away with the other. Whatever sugar making may be, it is not exactly accurate to describe it as a holiday in the woods.

* * * *

A whole day spent in the woods, with nothing to do but work, was soothing and refreshing. My old friends, the trees, were not concerning themselves with war or business or politics or title-hunting—though I don't see why they shouldn't have titles. I know a number of wooden men who have been knighted, and more—oh, so many more—who want to be knighted, who are not nearly so deserving as the trees. That oak down there in the field—"hearts of oak," "wooden walls of England"—who

AROUND HOME

deserves better of the Empire than the oak? I salute you, Sir Quercus! And the maple—surely the sons of Canada have shown the knightly quality of the maple. I salute you, Sir Maple! And this is the demure Lady Birch? I salute you, madam, and kiss the tips of your branches. But what nonsense is this? My trees say rebukingly, as they did to Emerson's fuss-budget, "So hot my little sirs!" The chief delight of working in the woods is that when one has struck his gait and has entered into the spirit of the solitude he forgets man and all his troubles. While gathering sap and brushwood and while feeding the fires I was not bothering my head about anybody or anything. There was no time for thinking or worrying, for the sap was spilling out and the fire needed a lot of attention. I was conscious of the companionship of my trees, for I have known them since I was a boy and they have not lost their ancient spirit of comradeship. As I move about among them they give me something more precious than their life-blood—they give me something of their peace and accord with Nature. What if I am tired out when I trudge home at nightfall with my burden of syrup? It is a sane and healthy weariness—not the bruised and fretful weariness I feel after a day in the city. By your leave, Sir Maple, I shall be of your following.

AROUND HOME

A Meal in the Woods

WHEN the real sugar weather finally came—warm, sunshiny days and frosty nights—there was work for everyone. The sap spilled from the trees, and before we were rightly in action there were buckets running over. Everyone in the countryside who is making sugar was astir at day-break, so as to get an early start. It is all very fine to talk about working regular hours, but when the sap begins to run all day, and occasionally on nights and Sundays, all good intentions of that kind go by the board. After the potash kettle was boiling properly I took the sheet-iron pan to another part of the bush where there was plenty of dry wood and fixed up a boiling place of my own. One end of the pan was placed on a dry beech log and the other end suspended from a pole supported by crutches. Then back-logs were laid at the sides of the pan with a foundation of six-inch logs under it, and the fire was started. To begin with, I had to gather sap and wood, but it did not take long to get things going. When I got on a full head of steam I found that I could put in a pail of sap every ten minutes, but with two hundred and seventy-five trees pouring we could only hold our own. Presently a boy came along with a tank full of sap and filled a barrel for me and then I was able to give all my time to the “boiling in.” As small dry brush make the hottest flame, I was kept busy feeding the fire and putting sap into the pan. After we struck

AROUND HOME

our gait we settled down to a long day. Except for occasional visits from the boy with the sap tank, I was alone. The work kept me so busy that I had no time to think of anything, though I was conscious all the time that the sunshine was warm and the south wind pleasantly laden with earthy odors. It was a day of physical enjoyment rather than mental, and the work was not too heavy.

Along about eleven o'clock I began to realize that the fire under the kettle was not the only one that needed attention. I needed to do some stoking myself, and I began to take long, eager looks through the woods and across the fields towards the house. People ought to realize that when a fellow has had breakfast at 6 o'clock he needs an early dinner—especially when he is working in the open air. Between keeping up the fire, putting in sap, watching for the boy with the lunch-basket, and speaking soothingly to my whimpering appetite, I was kept very busy for the next hour. And I don't know when an hour seemed so long. After the mill whistle in the village sounded for dinner I began to lose hold of my temper—and I kept getting hungrier all the time. Now that I am well-fed again I hate to think of the sarcastic phrases I coined to greet the boy with, and to say to the folks when I got home at night. I think there is a proverb that a hungry man is a cross man, and if there is not there should be. But we had not been forgotten entirely. The boy finally came along, whistling, looking happy and sluggish. He had

AROUND HOME

had his dinner, and could not understand how anybody could be hungry. There was a bitter moment when I discovered that instead of sending us a prepared dinner they had sent us the makings. Like Hamlet, I was in the humor to "eat a crocodile." But the other fireman came to my rescue, and we began to prepare our meal. The boy had brought a frying-pan filled with sliced, cooked potatoes and bacon, with a tin plate to cover it. This was placed on a bed of coals, and when the potatoes got hot we broke four new-laid eggs among them and put the pan back on the fire. There was also a pot of tea, that we placed where it would get hot. Besides this the basket yielded a plentiful supply of bread and butter and a custard pudding. By the time we got our plates, knives and forks and cups spread on a log, the potatoes, eggs and bacon were sizzling hot, and we fell to. Everything tasted so good that I felt the need of poetry to express my satisfaction, but the only line I could think of was one from "The Pious Editor's Creed":

"A marciful Providence fashioned us holler."

I was glad that I was hollow, and very hollow, for it would take much food to appease that hunger.

After we had "licked the platters clean" I was sorely tempted to play the blacksnake and stretch myself on a sunlit log, but the fire needed attention and the sap was flowing like mad. So I bestirred myself and went lazily to work, feeling that there is still much in life that is good. I was so contented that even a Big Interest might have spoken

AROUND HOME

to me and I would have answered it kindly. During the afternoon the sap did not go in so fast, for when the syrup gets thick it evaporates more slowly. But we kept the kettle and the pan foaming, and those who were gathering sap with the horse kept moving among the trees, and by 6 o'clock we had caught up with our work. It took us until 7 o'clock to thicken the syrup, and then we loaded our spoils on the waggon and started for home. There was a beautiful sunset of red and gold, and there were robins singing on all the tree-tops. But we did not linger to admire the beauties of Nature. We were every bit as hungry as we had been at noon and there were a lot of chores to attend to. But we had about ten gallons of syrup, and though we were all aching with weariness we were contented with our lot. And after supper and the chores I found what seemed the kindest and most comfortable bed I ever had dealings with, but I did not stay awake more than five minutes to revel in its luxuriousness. And the next thing I was conscious of was the sunlight pouring in through the window, and the first gnawings of that unappeasable appetite.

Sunshine and Steam

THERE is always something new to learn about farming, and I have just learned something to which I want to give the widest possible publicity. I have discovered the right way to plan

AROUND HOME

next year's work. All winter I had been trying to decide what to do this spring and summer in the line of increased production, but found it impossible to decide on anything definite. No matter what I thought of doing I would think of so many objections to it that I would be forced to give it up. But the other day, when the sun was shining brightly even though a north wind was blowing, I felt attracted by the sheltered south side of the haystack and sat down to think things over. The morning chores were done, and I had an hour to spare, and I felt lazy, and—and—well, I sat down on the sweet-smelling hay, where the sun could get at me and the wind couldn't. Before long I had a skinful of stimulating sunshine and "my thoughts grew sharp and clear." Before I was conscious of what I was doing I had planned enough farm work to keep the boys and me, and possibly a hired man, hard at it all summer. And I didn't think of a single objection to my plans. Dark, foreboding thoughts could not exist in that warm flood of light, and I was able to shape things to my satisfaction. Probably if some scientist were to look into the matter he would find an excellent physical and psychological reason for this. When the sunshine begins to get strong in the spring it stirs all nature to life, and why not man? It starts the birds to making their plans for the summer, and we who live as near to nature as they do should feel the same inspiration. And I believe we would if we would stop worrying and let the sunshine strengthen and purify us. So I have no hesitation

AROUND HOME

in advising every farmer who is having trouble shaping his plans for greater production to take an hour off and think things over on the sunny side of the stack, or in any other place where the great, serene sun can pour life and energy into his system. We need outdoor thinking as well as outdoor work to keep us healthy and sane.

Since I began blundering joyously with farming I have learned a few things that mean a great deal to me and that can be told in half a dozen sentences. As might be expected of a man of leisurely habits, I have learned that hard work is not the only thing needful in farming. It is necessary, of course, but it is too valuable to be wasted. It takes no more labour to till properly fertilized land than land that has not been fertilized, and you get better results. If you want only a certain definite result you can get it from a much smaller piece of fertilized land, and in that way economize labour. A still further economy can be made by using the very best seed that can be bought. Fertilizers and good seed are the greatest labour-savers I have come across. They give you the highest possible yield for your labour, and if you know what you want in the way of yield you can get it with a smaller expenditure of muscle. Every acre of corn I had last year more than paid for the seed corn used in the whole patch. It was planted between the rows of young trees in the new orchard, and as the orchard planting took a lot of time, the corn was planted so late that it was the laughing-stock of all real farmers, but the ground was thoroughly worked and heavily

AROUND HOME

manured, the seed of the best early maturing variety; and the result was so satisfactory that some of the best real farmers have been asking if I will have seed corn to sell this spring. Ears from eight inches to a foot long are just as easy to raise as nubbins, and it takes less of them to fill the corn-crib. The plans I made while sunning myself the other day involve a smaller rather than a larger acreage, but the experience I have had convinces me that if all goes well I can increase production with the usual amount of labour.

Spring Relish

A HORSERADISH that was growing where no horseradish should be, attracted my attention to itself by putting forth the first tender green in the garden. When I saw it I felt the immediate need of vitamins, fat solubles and all the up-to-date food necessities. I am not sure that horseradish comes among the recommended vegetables, but that can be explained by the fact that scientists are mostly city people, while the horseradish is robustiously countrified. Its vitamins have "pep" in them, and they are on tiptoe all the time. Anyway, I felt the need of horseradish in my diet, and dug up the root at once. It was a fresh plant, with many long tender roots about the thickness of a man's finger. Gathering these roots, I scraped and washed them carefully, and then put them through the meat

AROUND HOME

chopper. This grated them sufficiently, and when treated with sugar, salt and vinegar the horseradish furnished a dish that a king might turn up his nose at—for it is very pungent—but that any man should relish. When mixed with mashed potatoes, horseradish gives a dish with a tang. It is good with meats, and may be used to make a spicy sandwich. It is our first taste of natural fresh food this season, and suggests the succulent feasts ahead when pot-herbs may be gathered and brought to the table. There is something in getting one's food direct from nature in this way that begets a thankful spirit.

“Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets.”

Shakespeare failed with his rhyme in that couplet, but he had the right idea.

A Savage Sheep

LIVE and learn. Anything is liable to happen. “Those of us who live longest will know the most.” Up to yesterday morning if anyone had told me that a sheep would try to kill anything I would have greeted the statement with derision. Once in high school I heard a boy describe a sheep as “a predatory animal,” but his definition was not accepted. But yesterday I caught Katie, a fine, motherly, pure-bred Oxford ewe of unquestioned pedigree, with a numbered tag in her ear, trying

AROUND HOME

to kill a hen. There was murder in her eye, and I am convinced that if I had not arrived on the scene in time the egg production of the farm would have been reduced by one egg a day. I was busy cleaning out the horse stable when I heard a series of bangs that synchronized with the agonized squawks of a hen in sore distress. Hurrying to the sheep pen from which the sounds came, I found Katie backing up for another headlong bunt at a hen that was stuck under the gate. It was a fine White Wyandotte that our Minister of Agriculture would have looked at with an approving eye. She was trying to escape between two palings, but, being a wedge-shaped hen of the type approved by poultry experts, the harder she tried to get through, the tighter she got stuck. And while she was struggling Katie was driving in the wedge with furious bunts. Fortunately, the hen was on the floor, so that when the sheep bunted her forehead struck the gate first, and only her nose struck the hen. Every time Katie bunted the gate banged and the hen squawked. I rescued the hen as quickly as possible, and Katie nuzzled her two lambs and bleated softly to them. She was telling them that she would never allow a hen to eat her darlings. It was evident that the Wyandotte, in her eager search for palatable pickings, had entered the sheep pen, and, perhaps having a hereditary memory of the attacks of eagles, Katie offered battle to the intruding bird. I am sure that if I had not gone to the rescue the hen would have been killed, for she was stuck fast, and if the sheep had managed to

AROUND HOME

land one bunt with the whole weight of her body behind it the result would have been fatal. And we would have wondered what had happened to the hen, for I am sure none of us would have thought of blaming the sheep. Thus do we live and learn.

Whittling

YESTERDAY I rediscovered the great art of whittling. We have no artistic whittlers nowadays. It is years since I have seen a basket whittled from a peach stone. Once upon a time every young buck had one suspended from his watch chain. And I never see wooden chains among the mantel ornaments, or picture frames deftly whittled and pieced together from bits of cigar boxes. Skilful whittlers used to make canes that had snakes coiled around them and a hand-grip made of a ball clutched by an eagle's talons. Time was when almost everyone used to whittle, and many did it well. In the long winter evenings they would whittle out toys for the children and articles of use and adornment for the home. But now they waste their time reading the papers or at similar nonsense. How many of the men who read this have whittled a "bo'n'arrer" for a son or grandson, or, like E. W. Thomson, "The Sweetest Whistle Ever Blew?" I tell you that you are losing a lot of solid enjoyment. I know, for I have just

AROUND HOME

put in some hours at whittling, and I haven't enjoyed myself so much since I was vaccinated. The children sat around and watched the long white shavings curling from my knife, and one of them remarked that we were just like the Swiss Family Robinson. For some happy hours I forgot that I was three articles, and dear knows how many letters, behind with my writing, and that there are still a couple of stalls to be fixed up in the stable before we settle down for the winter. I got so absorbed in my work that before I got done the perspiration was dripping from my face. I never realized that whittling was such work or that a man could get so much joy from seeing the piece of wood take form under his knife. We lose a great deal by having so much of our work done by turning lathes. The work may be done more rapidly, but there is no joy in it and no artistic value.

What started me whittling was the necessity of putting a new handle in an axe. Some ambitious splitter had driven the blade into a knot and had broken the handle while trying to yank it out. There may be some easy way of getting the end of an axe-handle out of the eye (that is what some people call it), but I never learned it. I was afraid to burn it out of the stove for fear of taking the temper out of the axe, so I soaked it in coal oil and let it burn as long as it would. That did no good. Then I went at it with a big spike, and by labouring at it for a couple of hours managed to chew it out. To make matters worse; there was an iron wedge

AROUND HOME

in the end of the handle, but by keeping at it doggedly I got it out. The new handle was factory-made, but as I had been careful not to get one that was cross-grained, it was fairly easy to trim. First I whittled it down to almost the exact size of the hole in which it was to be fitted, and then went at it with a piece of broken glass. By scraping it carefully I finally got it to a size that made it possible to drive it home. I am not sure that the blade is hung as an expert woodsman would have it, but it will do to split wood. Sometimes I manage to hit twice in the same place with it, so I do not think I made a very bad job of it. I couldn't do any better with the old handle, and it was put in by an expert.

After the axe had been tested I was reminded that the swab-stick of the rifle was broken, and that I had said that some day I would whittle out a new one. It had been found that it was impossible to get a swab-stick at any of the local stores. The lust of whittling being upon me by this time, I decided to undertake the job at once. In the good old days we used to whittle out our own ramrods and swab-sticks, and the stock of the first gun I ever carried had been made with a jackknife by a local whittler. In undertaking to make the new swab-stick I had let myself in for a neater job than I had expected. The rifle is a .32 calibre, and this meant the whittling of a smooth, strong rod of small size. After careful consideration I decided that by going at it cautiously I could get a swab-

AROUND HOME

stick out of the old axe handle. To begin with, I trimmed it down as far as I dared with the axe, and then began with the jackknife. As shavings are clean dirt, and not hard to sweep up, I was allowed to do this job beside the kitchen stove, with four interested youngsters having their noses so close to my work that I was in danger of cutting them. There was a little while during which I was able to slice off long, clean shavings, but when I had the rod reduced to less than half an inch in diameter I had to be careful. A shaving that developed into a sliver might spoil the whole job. Little thin shavings were now in order, and I had to be sure that each was taken from exactly the right place. It took fully an hour of this kind of work before I had a rod that would begin to enter the bore of the rifle. Then I resorted to the piece of broken glass and sandpaper. I was amazed to find the amount of solid satisfaction I got from trimming that little stick to the purpose for which it was required. After the rod was rounded and smoothed to my own satisfaction and that of my critics I carefully made a little knob on the end, that was to carry the cleaning rag through the barrel. Then I made a good hand-grip on the other end. When the crucial time came to clean the gun with the new swabstick I had a veritable triumph, for all agreed that it worked better than the wire swabber that came with the gun. I had achieved a reputation as a master whittler that will probably get me in for a lot of other little jobs of the same kind.

In the days when whittling was a real art and

AROUND HOME

jackknives were better than they are now, there was always a lot of real work to do in this line. Many choppers whittled out their own axe-handles; stable and even house brooms were made by skillfully whittling a blue beech or hickory sapling, and every winter we had to whittle a supply of spiles for the spring sugar-making. More ambitious whittlers used to make wooden spoons, butter ladles, butter bowls and similar useful articles. I am not sure, but I think the jackknives they had in those days were better than those we have now. The ambition of every normal boy was to have a "Rogers" knife made in Sheffield, and I remember hearing about some schoolboys who gave up their lunches to a tramp who told them that he was the son of Rogers, the man who made the jackknives.

The Carefree Woodchuck

I ADMIRE the woodchuck. His evolutionary development followed well-considered lines. That is why he is such a fat rascal and lives in clover. He doesn't worry. He sleeps. When he strikes a spell of weather such as we are having just now he goes down into his hole and snoozes until the little warm airs steal down to him and announce a return of sunshine. Stevenson probably had woodchucks in mind when he wrote:

"They lay in a blessed swound
For days and days together
In their dwellings underground."

AROUND HOME

The woodchuck is not cursed with "a mania for owning things"—especially things that must be milked twice a day and fed regularly. When a sleet storm comes along the woodchuck knows just what to do—so he does nothing. Though I can make myself as comfortable beside the stove as a woodchuck is in his hole there are always cares that drive me out into the storm at frequent intervals. This morning I sat by the stove and "read *The Globe* for forty-eight years" while the east wind drove the sleet against the windows. The world outside is silver grey with ice. The rose bushes look as if they were made of glass and already the apple trees are looking as if it wouldn't take much more to start the branches breaking off. And yesterday we thought that spring was here. O, to be a woodchuck when April is here!

Fishin'

ON MONDAY night I was called upon vehemently to forbid a fish-spearing expedition to the Government drain, but behold the contrarieness of human nature! Instead of exercising my overlordship, I reproached the boys for having planned such an expedition without having invited me to go along with them. Now what on earth can you do with a man like that? Etc., etc. It was hardly correct to call it a fish-spearing expedition, for there was no spear. An ordinary

AROUND HOME

pitchfork was carried for the purpose of heaving the fish out of the water. A fish fully a foot long had been seen in the afternoon and one eight inches long had been captured by hand after it had gone into hiding under a hanging bit of sod on the ditch bank. Unfortunately, it had flopped back into the stream from the bank, where it had been placed while another fish was being pursued. I really did not need all this evidence, for I had captured fish of the same size in the same Government drain many years ago, and could still remember the thrills. The stable lantern was carried for the purpose of locating the fish and furnishing light for throwing them out. One boy walked on one side of the water holding the lantern, so as to light the bottom of the stream, while the other walked on the other side, peering down keenly and carrying the pitchfork ready for action. I kept to the grassy bank, where the walking was good. In this way we investigated all the shallow spots in the stream within the confines of the farm and along the cross-road, without sighting even a minnow. Then I remembered a shallow spot in another branch of the drain where I had helped to capture fish over forty years ago. The boys climbed over a wire fence to reach the spot, while I remained on the road. No sooner was the light cast on the shallow than there was a yell—two yells, in fact.

“OO-oo! Three of them! Great big ones!”

I hereby affirm that from where I stood on the road, fully three rods away, I saw one of those fish, and would venture the opinion that it was fully two feet long.

AROUND HOME

"Heave them out," I yelled.

For the first time the boy who was carrying the fork realized what he was carrying it for. But before he could get into action the fish also got into action, and all he was able to do was to lift the tail of one out of the water as it slithered over the tines of the fork. The fish escaped into the deep pool of roily water and there was no locating them, though we caught a glimpse of one of them. The disappointment was terrible, and there were accusations and counter-accusations, which were presently cut off by a thunderstorm that drove us home. And next morning the Government drain was overflowing its banks, owing to the downpour of rain. There is no knowing where those big fish are now, and it may be a week before the drain will be fit to fish in again. It is a sad world!

Certainly the world does not change so very much. Over forty years ago I went fishing at the same spot with a pitchfork. A man whom we boys considered old was with us—but he insisted on carrying the pitchfork. He probably had experience, for when the fish were sighted there was no waiting and yelling. He went to work quickly and methodically and heaved out half a dozen fish before they got over the stupor or blindness caused by the light. We got the fish at the same shallows where they were sighted on Monday night. And the two fishing parties were the same in almost every respect, except that the moderns wore rubber boots, instead of cow-hides. But you will notice that the fish got away from the moderns.

[47]

AROUND HOME

We have lost something of the caveman expertness. For two generations we have been getting our fish from a fish peddler, and that "dulls the edge of husbandry," or words to that effect. But the boys of today are just as keen for primitive methods of fishing as were the boys of other days. It has occurred to me that there is another difference. I saw something in the papers about some boys down in Chatham who were fined for spearing pike—presumably in the Government drains of that locality. If there were laws of that kind when I was a boy I never heard of them. And even if we were breaking the law on our fishing expedition we didn't break it for we didn't get any fish. Personally I cannot see any wild need for protecting the fish that find their way into the Government drains. We hear much clamor just now because people disregard so many laws. Isn't it perhaps because the business of making laws has been overdone? Even if there are no laws to protect the fish in the Government drains that pass through farms inhabited by healthy predatory boys, there are other laws just as foolish—about farm muskrats, for instance. The way to get laws respected is to show some discretion in passing them.

AROUND HOME

The Collie Pup

AFTER mature consideration and much wrath, it was finally decided that the never-ending audacity of Plymouth Rock hens was no longer to be endured. Not only did they insist on using the hollyhock-bed as a dusting resort, but they showed an investigating spirit regarding all newly seeded garden spots that was intolerable. So it was decided that we must get a pup—a Collie pup. He would be trained to make those hens respect the rights of minorities, and when he got his growth he could make pigs curb their aggressiveness and show a due regard for boundaries. We could all think of things that a Collie dog might do and of steps that he could save us. So we negotiated for a pup. Last Wednesday he arrived by express at the local station and completed his journey on the bicycle of one of his enthusiastic owners. He looked subdued and friendless, but after he had broken bread with us and had a drink of milk he evidently made up his mind that we were not a bad sort, and decided to make himself at home. At the present stage in his development he looks as if he belonged to the Teddy Bear family. His colour is a light buff and he has black markings around his eyes that give him the appearance of wearing tortoise-shell glasses. He is ready for play at all times, and his whereabouts may be determined by the yells of persons wearing low

AROUND HOME

shoes and having exposed ankles. He cannot see ankles without wanting to try his teeth on them. After a play he has a way of suddenly squatting on his haunches and looking at one solemnly. He looks as if he were going to develop into a really thoughtful and considerate dog.

The first thing our Collie pup had to do was to get acquainted with the farm's population of cats with high political titles. Evidently he hadn't had much experience of cats, for he rushed up on them without understanding the meaning of arched backs and fluffed-up tails. Before he could be rescued he got a scratched nose, and he whimpered pitifully. But it didn't take him long to learn that cats are not nearly so cuddly as they look. When he sees one now his head goes down between his front paws and he jumps back and forth barking saucily. And there is always trouble at feeding time. The titled cat swings a nasty paw—and he insists on getting the last bite when there are pickings to be had. But the pup will soon be able to take care of himself. The cats know in their hearts that when he gets his growth they will have to step lively, and they hate him accordingly. As he is only about two months old it is a little early to begin his training. But I have noticed his young owners studying a newspaper clipping which tells all about the training of a Collie dog. At first I was rather amazed to realize that learning is now so widely diffused that we have pundits who do not hesitate to interfere in the education of a pup. But a little reflection made me realize that the educa-

AROUND HOME

tion of dogs is perhaps an older institution than the education of human beings, and that the Minister of Education in the older orders of society devoted his time entirely to the supervision of dogs and horses. Every feudal castle had its Master of the Hounds, who educated the dogs, and their owners valued them more than they did their serfs. Does not Browning tell us that a deposed Roman Emperor ended his days as a tutor for dogs and an expert at treating their ailments? He sings of the unfortunate Protus, who was dethroned by John the Pannonian :

“I deduce
He wrote the little tract ‘On Worming Dogs,’
Whereof the name in sundry catalogues
Is extant yet.”

So it is evident that no apology need be made for devoting thought to the care of a dog. Many notable precedents could be quoted.

Impudence

HAS any philosopher made a study of impudence as a factor of evolution? If so it has escaped my notice, but the theme is one that might be elaborated with profit. If this were not an unusually busy season I might attempt the task, with due humility, for at the present time the farm reeks of impudence. Twelve little pigs are ranging freely about the place, and each one is a lump of

AROUND HOME

impudence with a curl in its tail. Whenever I venture in their vicinity they trail along behind, and their impudence is of the kind defined by the Century Dictionary—"Unblushing impertinence, manifesting itself in words, tones, gestures, looks, etc." They impudently demand more food, although they are being fed a balanced ration that has been mapped out to put fat on their ribs as rapidly as is consistent with the development of a bacon-type hog. It is a liberal ration, based on skim-milk and fortified with shorts and corn, and I am positive that they do not know what the pangs of hunger mean. Nevertheless they trot behind me impudently and squeal impudently and impudently keep beyond range of a swinging boot. Impudence must be an element of pig psychology, and they must find expression for it whether it does them any good or not. I have known people just like that. If anyone is interested in the subject of impudence he should make a study of pigs. The characteristic seems the same as when it appears in a human being, and pigs are not complex. The student would find it at its best in well-nourished pigs of about two months old. In the earlier stages they are cunning and cute and when older they show force and greed, but at the two-month stage they are simply impudent. And at that stage they can still get through wire fences in an exasperating way. And the final touch of impudence is the jaunty little curl in their tails. They are very trying.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

We seem to be developing a new strain of free-ranging hogs. The noble twelve, whose impudence I have recorded, are still so small that they can slip between the wires of any ordinary fence, and I find that they are investigating the whole countryside. Yesterday I saw them half-way across a neighbouring farm. This morning I saw them scampering into the woodlot at the back of the farm like a lot of white rabbits. It is not because they are hungry and hunting for food, for they get a full ration whenever they want it. They are not entirely dependent on the ministrations of their mother, the Speed-hound, but have a trough placed where they can get to it at any time and get a feed of wheat-meal. But they want to see the world before they get too big to slip through the fences. My attention was first called to their wanderings by the protests of their mother. A few days ago I heard her letting out unfamiliar roars, and went to see what was the matter. I found her walking along a wire fence and letting out her strange roar—not a squeal—every few seconds. Her family was fully thirty rods away in a stubble field. Presently they heard her, and recognized the roar as the call to dinner. At once they began to scamper home, all squealing at the top of their lungs. They suddenly remembered that they were hungry. This is the first time I ever heard a sow calling to her family—beyond emitting the conversational grunts one hears when she is going about the barnyard with her family trailing at her heels. These free-ranging pigs should get an

AROUND HOME

amount of exercise that will increase their growth and develop them into the select bacon type. Just now they are at the cunning and amusing stage of their development, and there is nothing left in the fields that they can plunder on their rambles.

Sunshine

THE young life on the farm is rejoicing in the sunshine. I saw the lambs playing king of the castle on an empty hencoop this morning, and they were having so much fun I couldn't help wondering if it would not be possible to have their sport filmed for a movie show. They bunted one another from the roof and fell sprawling to the ground, but bounced right up and rushed right back into the scuffle. Then I felt ashamed of myself to think that I couldn't watch the lambs at play without seeing commercial possibilities in their innocent sport. But if I were a movie fan I would probably be aware that some one else has thought of the idea and that lamb films are already in use. As the calves are kept in a pen most of the time, when they got out in the sunshine the heat seemed to raise the steam in them, so that they ran around the orchard until they were exhausted. They were so wild that when I tried to give them their morning ration of milk they would not let me get near them, but scampered away as if they were afraid I was going to put them back in their pen again. But

AROUND HOME

it was not long until they began to bawl for their breakfast and they took it meekly. The little pigs are now too big to get through the wire fences, and as each of them has a nice little copper ring in its nose they are not able to make a nuisance of themselves. When they are moving around they grunt impudently, but their favourite occupation is lying in the sunshine and letting the heat soak into them. Although the new colt is of great interest to his mother, he has not excited much admiration from anyone else. He has not become accustomed to walking on stilts, but in a few days he will be able to scamper around and will look as if his legs were made for him instead of being a set of misfits. Bildad, the pup, is also partial to sleeping in the sunshine, and although he is already keeping the hens off the lawn I hear bitter complaints of his doings in the flower beds. His merry way of rushing through the tulips is fully as destructive as the dusting of the hens.

A Song of Asparagus

SING we now the asparagus! Let others laud the daffodil and hyacinth, the brisk hepatica and the rathe spring beauty. They do well enough for inconsequent poets, but are not satisfying to the man who relishes his victuals. The fatturion of the esculent asparagus pushing from the rich soil is to me a fairer sight. What it lacks in

AROUND HOME

beauty it makes up in vitamins, and when you get it fresh from the earth it hath elusive savours unknown to the epicure of canned comestibles. What do they know of asparagus who only canned asparagus know? And they are little better who get it from the market where it has been drying in the sun while awaiting customers. Half an hour from the garden to the table is the right rule—and a lavish supply of new grass butter to drip from it like molten gold. Gathering the asparagus is now what gathering mushrooms will be later. Every morning the little patch—why didn't I make it bigger when I was at it?—shows from four to five dozen thick sprouts that are edible from end to end. One cannot restrain the impulse to go to see the display in the morning, though we restrain our raptures until our appetites are sharp set for dinner. "The asparagus is on," is a dinner call of power. There is no waiting after that delectable announcement is made. I know I shouldn't be making people envious in this way—but think of those fat vitamins and the ravishing flavours. Mm-mm-mm!

Storms at Sunrise

YESTERDAY and to-day we had thunderstorms at sunrise. When the first one roused us we deserted the tent and scurried to the house. But this morning the thunder began to rumble in the distance about four o'clock, and when I got up

AROUND HOME

to see if a storm were really coming, I noticed that the children were sound asleep. So I decided that we would be brave and stay in our tent. Closing the flaps, I went back to bed and awaited developments. Presently there was a sharp flash of lightning and a smashing peal of thunder. A tousled head popped up from a bed, took a look to see that I was still in the tent, and then disappeared under the bed-clothes. A moment later another head went through the same performance, and we settled down to enjoy the storm, each in his own way. There were a few gusts of high wind that broke down an old apple tree a few rods away, and made me feel uncomfortable about the prospects for the tent, but it was properly staked and it stood the test. Then the rain came—and came and came. The tent filled with a fine mist, but it was not until the storm was about over that water began to drip. It was the heaviest rain of the season, and the tent turned it wonderfully. By the time it was past it was time to be stirring for breakfast, and as we talked it over we decided that sleeping in a tent during a thunderstorm is a great adventure. When the lightning flashed the whole tent seemed to be bathed in flame. The light, that for some reason showed a pinkish tinge, seemed to come from every direction. In a way it seemed more disquieting than when observed in the open or in a house. Of course, these observations are all my own. All that the people under the clothes were able to observe was that going through a storm in a tent is a somewhat suffocating experience. But after

AROUND HOME

the storm we are having a glorious day. The world has been wind-lashed and rain-soaked and thunder-shaken. And after the riot of the elements

“Pan lies drunk among the reeds,
Sleeping off his evil deeds.”

To-day I am haunted by a quotation that is very sentimental, though I am not feeling a bit sentimental. Quite the contrary. But the last line of the stanza has a thought that seems wonderfully appropriate to this season, and as I do not like to spoil a literary gem by reducing it to fragments, I repeat it entire, just as my memory gives it back to me. Here it is, but please remember that the last line is the only one that appeals to me:

“I trusted in the smile her pure face wore,
I lingered o’er the music of her words,
And could have doubted of her love no more
Than summer could have doubted of her birds.”

Summer, or rather Nature, never doubts. Her wonderful work goes on without stay and without hesitation, although almost every part depends on some other part for its perfection. The apple trees put out their wonderful profusion of bloom, never doubting that at the right season the bees will appear to gather nectar and fertilize the blossoms with pollen. And the bees rear their broods in the early spring, never doubting that there will be plenty of flowers to feed them later on. All nature is incredibly interdependent. Special flowers must be visited by special insects, and in many cases these insects must have a special conformation before

AROUND HOME

they can inadvertently perform the proper functions for the waiting blossoms. But in spite of this strange and apparently haphazard complexity Nature never doubts. She goes on producing the different parts of her plan with a perfect faith that somehow the different parts will come together at the right time, so that all forms of life may survive and multiply. And I may as well note in passing that the same law applies to her pests and blights. The onion worms seem to know that I will plant onions and the cabbage worms that I will plant cabbages. And the curculio and the codling moth never doubt that there will be plums and apples for their unhallowed progeny. In fact, Nature seems to be bound together by an amazing faith that envelops all things—except man.

Man does not seem to get it through his head that seedtime and harvest will come every year, or else he rushes away to the city, where he will have nothing to do with them and with their burdensome toil. He alone seems unable to understand that the wealth of the world will be reproduced every season, and he wears himself out trying to "save oop." Being without faith he is continually building towers of Babel, though he now does it with more skill than was shown by the inhabitants of the plain of Shinar. A modern great fortune is nothing more than a financial tower of Babel, built by someone who hopes to escape disaster through the power of wealth. He fondly hopes that he and his family will survive, whether

AROUND HOME

the seedtime and harvest come or not. And in our financial tower-building we have a great advantage over the ancients in the material we use. There is no danger of a confusion of tongues, because money talks in all languages. But, in spite of the success that attends our modern tower-building, it is every bit as futile as the monumental folly of the ancients. Most of the great fortunes of a generation ago are already as completely scattered as the bricks of Babel or the wealth of Croesus. In spite of their imposing magnificence they are no more substantial than

“The unbuilt Romes and Karnaks of my mind.”

And it is because men doubt and are without the faith that floods all Nature that they waste their lives in this futile tower of fortune building.

That Cow-Poke

A COUPLE of weeks ago I thought I had discovered the perfect cow-poke, with full details for its manufacture. It was guaranteed not only to keep a cow within bounds, but also to defy all attempts to slip or shake it off. Quite so. Our bovine Houdini wore this new all-conquering poke for five days and behaved with becoming meekness. But she was simply studying out its working and figuring how to beat it. Then she got rid of her poke and went off to see the world. She not only got rid of it, but she hid it. She must have

AROUND HOME

carried it to the woodlot and buried it by pawing leaves over it. Or she took it to the pond and dropped it in, and the chain that was a part of its make-up was heavy enough to carry it to the bottom. Or, perhaps, she ate it. Anyway, the poke is gone—disappeared—non est. A boy and I ranged over about fifty acres as carefully as a couple of beagles without finding a trace of it. The more I think of it the more I am inclined to believe that she ate the poke. That cow is capable of anything. When she was rid of it she decided to visit a herd of cattle on a neighbouring farm, and went through, or under, three fences to get to them. I followed her spoor when hunting for the poke, and, as nearly as I could figure it out, she got by one of the fences by lying down on her side and wriggling under it like a dog. Oh, that cow is a wonder! When I found her among the neighbour's cows, I took much satisfaction in noting that all the bigger cows were taking turns in beating her up. When I rescued her I didn't do a thing to her. She walked home meekly through gates that I opened for her, and I trailed along behind making a mental review of all kinds of neckwear, from the prehistoric torc to summer furs—not omitting the Dahomeyan slave fork. But I could not remember anything that suggested an improvement on the poke I had been using. Houdini was put in her stall in the stable while I made a new poke.

That is one thing in favour of this poke. It is easy to make. It is never hard to find a forked branch, and cow-chains are not in use in the sum-

AROUND HOME

mer-time, and may be borrowed to complete the job. When adjusting the new instrument it occurred to me that it might be improved by drawing the ends of the forked branch closer together with a piece of rope. This addition was made, and for two days Houdini has consented to live with us within the bounds of the pasture field. But she looks as if she were thinking hard, and I am quite prepared to have anything happen. In the meantime she is giving a plentiful supply of milk rich in butterfat, and we are willing to go on matching wits with her until the time comes to fatten her for beef.

New Eating

A WORD to all who love good eating—and even to those who sourly profess an austerity that scorns the satisfactions of the flesh. What I am going to tell about might have been used as a side-dish by those who sat “a guest with Daniel at his pulse.” It is cheap enough to be within the reach of the wayside hobo and yet delicious enough to have been served by Lucullus or Apicius—

“With monster lampreys from Pompeii caught fresh,
Fed upon human flesh,
To tempt his morbid delicacy of taste.”

Someone told me once that milkweed sprouts are as good as asparagus. I didn't believe him. Even now I am only willing to admit that they are

AROUND HOME

as good as the asparagus you get in the cities. They fall short of the gustatory exuberance of our home-grown asparagus, but they are very good. As I am always willing to try anything once, if it falls within my means, I took a basket and the butcher-knife and hied me to the Government drain, on whose exposed clay banks I had noticed young milkweeds pushing through and making a showing not unlike that of the asparagus bed on a favoured morning. Where the sprouts were just coming through the ground I slipped the knife several inches below them and got as much as I could of the tender, fibreless stems. Where the weeds had made a slight growth I selected only those that had not expanded more than six leaves and snapped them off at a point where the stem was still soft and brittle. After getting a sufficient supply I took them to the house, and, under protest, they were prepared according to the instructions I had received. After being thoroughly washed they were boiled, with plenty of salt. It takes longer to boil milkweed tips than asparagus, but when they are soft and well-cooked the superfluous water is poured off. Milk, butter and flour are then added and the dish is prepared and served like creamed asparagus. It lacks the characteristic flavour of asparagus, but has a winning savour of its own.

I have no hesitation in saying that an ordinary unobservant person would eat creamed milkweed tips on toast and be convinced that it was asparagus. And if a tip or two of asparagus was added to give the flavour it would fool the elect them-

AROUND HOME

selves. So if there is a patch of milkweed on your farm, don't indulge in day-dreams about the fortune you are going to make when Henry Ford begins to extract rubber tires from milkweed, but go at once and pick a mess of the tender sprouts. Do not dally with the well-grown weeds. Get the sprouts just as they are pushing through the ground, and you will have a feast full of vitamins—water-solubles A, B and C, and all the rest of that kind of jargon.

* * *

The Ducklings

I ONCE ventured to surmise that the end of a duck's bill is very sensitive. Well, it is. The other day we had a fire in a corner of the yard and an omnivorous duckling came along looking for something unclassified to eat. Seeing the white ashes, which covered some live coals, he thrust in an investigating beak. Instantly he threw back his head with so much violence that for a moment he stood on his tail and pawed the air with his web feet. There was no longer any doubt in my mind as to the sensitiveness of the end of a duck's bill. And judging from the awkward way in which he stood on one leg and soothed the injured member with the toe of his other foot his beak must have been uncommonly tender. But though I smiled at his awkwardness I could not help admiring the acrobatic skill with which he took stock of his in-

AROUND HOME

juries. If you were to burn the tip of your nose—say by poking it into a political controversy or some similar heated subject—you would find it both hard and awkward to stand on one leg and stroke your nose with the big toe of your free foot. I haven't tried it yet, but I think I have sufficient imagination to realize just how hard it would be. But besides learning that a duck has a sensitive bill I discovered that the scientists are inaccurate in saying that a duck is omnivorous. He is not. The duck is not a fire-eater.

I have had it in mind for some time to make a careful and exhaustive study of the young ducks, but they are too active and the weather is too hot. Most people have an impression that ducks are placid creatures that habitually float around on ponds and live a kind of amphibious existence like the idle rich at a summer resort. As usual the popular opinion, in which I shared until a few days ago, is all wrong. At the present writing I regard the duck as the embodiment of action. If you stop to think about it you can understand why this is so. A bird does not get the reputation of being omnivorous without being unusually active. A duck's diet ranges from moths and flies in the air to slugs and snails on the ground and the roots of plants in the bottoms of ponds and streams. It takes everything within its range that flies, crawls, swims or grows. It strains water through its beak for the smallest insects and particles of food, and I have seen a three-inch frog disappear into a

AROUND HOME

duck's capacious gullet. Besides they are always ready for a feed of grain or table scraps. In their native state they are models of efficiency. They can live in the air, on the earth or in the water. They are possessed of all means of locomotion. They can fly better than airships, dive better than submarines, and if you try to follow them in their predatory rambles in the fields you will need an automobile. Their web' feet serve as propellers when swimming and as snowshoes in the winter. Nature has fitted ducks to live in any and all conditions, and when they are young they live up to all their possibilities.

While watching the young ducks for the purposes of this article, I was led to wonder why they have received so little attention from our artists. A duck in action shows more life and energy than the horses rising from the sea on the frieze of the Parthenon. As nearly as I can judge, it is the only creature that uses all dimensions of space in its movements. A horse when running moves in only one dimension. A cow moves in two dimensions, for while moving forward she swings her legs sideways. But a duck when travelling moves forward with its legs, sideways with its body and all the time has its head bobbing up and down. In this way it is constantly moving in the three dimensions and exhibiting motion in all its forms. The artist who is ambitious to make a vivid picture should study the duck. But besides using the three dimensions of space the duck shows its activ-

AROUND HOME

ity in other ways. For instance, when it is pursuing a nimble bug or grasshopper it not only runs, but when it is within striking distance it shoots out its neck like a rattlesnake. This doubles the speed of its approach and gives its attacks a suddenness that is overwhelming. In fact, the young ducks are so supernaturally active that it brings out the sweat on my brow even to sit at the typewriter and describe them.

The more I tried to study the young ducks the more I felt the effects of the heat. My observations presently became breathless and disjointed, for the ducks could scoot through the wire fences, while I had to climb over—a decidedly ticklish operation. At last I got so tired that I threw myself on the grass under a shady tree and went to sleep. Then the ducklings came around and studied me. They squatted on the grass and conversed in low tones until I finally awakened. Then I decided that I had found the best way to study them. All I had to do was to keep still and they would pass me every few minutes in their rushing excursions around the farm. Between sleeping and watching and enjoying the splendid summer day, I made these disjointed notes that I would elaborate into a real article if I didn't feel so lazy—I mean leisurely:

A duck plays close to the ground, like a politician who represents a country constituency.

A duckling gets as much pleasure and pride out of its first feathers as a boy does out of the first

AROUND HOME

hairs of his moustache. Compare appetite of a young duckling and of a growing boy.

A duck always watches you with one eye and has the other on the watch for bugs and eatables. Query: Do a duck's eyes move together or independently of each other? As they are set so far apart there would be no advantage in having them move together. Perhaps they do not move at all. They are so placed that they can probably see in most every direction at the same time. I could probably find out by catching a duck, but it is too hot to try to run one down.

When the young ducks get their first feathers they will be ready to fatten for the table. A pleasant thought.

At this point a June thunderstorm drove me into the house, and I left the young ducks trying to flap their scrawny and downy wings and getting ready to enjoy themselves.

II. Summer



A June Reverie

ONCE more we are "knee-deep in June," and in the little lull between the corn and the hay we are able to look about us—and enjoy. Everywhere there is a luxuriance of life and the promise of harvest, and over all the great serenity of Nature. Each year I seem to get nearer to the heart of things in this elemental world, that is forever re-creating all forms, all forces and all desires, so that the great drama of life may sweep on to unknown climaxes. It is a world of mysteriously beautiful activities that can be reached only through the gates of toil, and its wonders have never been said or sung. It is a world of "Mandragora" and "drowsy sirops," and those who reach it are smitten with the enchantment of the lotus-eaters. Having tasted the stream of life at its source, their lips are touched with a divine silence. If the poets—the indolent singers of imagined joys—have penetrated the arcana of nature they have left no song to allure us on the path they have trod. In the workaday world the poets are with me at all times and their glowing phrases spring to my lips at every turn, but at the heart of things I am left to stammer for myself. They have sung the "wrath of the son of Peleus," "justified the ways of God to man," and hymned the mountain daisy, but the great epic of life and the joy of life is still unsung. Before it can

AROUND HOME

be sung, poets and their lovers must become in accord with life, the necessary work of the world must be made a joy instead of slavery, and the swiftly-turning pages of the book of destiny must be read by a race of men free and equal. It will be the song of a far and perfect time towards which we are stumbling forward, but even now we can catch strains of its swelling music.

This morning, while listening to the wind "lulling the long grass," I caught a flash such as might have illumed Hypatia when expounding Homer to the students of Alexandria. I have seen it argued that the Iliad is not a narrative of real events, but a piece of wonderful symbolism. It has been asserted that the siege of Troy is but "a repetition of the daily siege of the East by the solar powers that every evening are robbed of their brightest treasures in the west; and the Homeric heroes and their exploits all represent allegorically, in one form or another, the great conflict between Light and Darkness." For a blazing moment I realized that the Iliad is perhaps as true of the fields of Ontario as is was of "the windy plains of Troy." The Judgment of Paris is being re-enacted every day. To every country boy come dreams of wealth and power such as Juno might give; glimpses of Minerva-like wisdom revealed in the workings of Nature; flashes of supernal beauty that suggest the allurements of Aphrodite, and he must choose between them and make his award as surely as did the Idalian shepherd. Following this hint, it would not be hard to symbolize from familiar life all the

AROUND HOME

characters of the world's greatest epic and show that the Trojan War is being unfolded in our prosaic fields. Moreover, we may see that Homer suggested the possibility of three epics when he wrote one. If Juno had been adjudged the fairest, Paris would have been a greater Alexander or Napoleon triumphantly ruling a conquered world. But this would be beyond human experience. If he had given the award to Minerva he would have been the ideal philosopher, who would make over the world in a way that would more than realize the dream of every reformer that ever lived. This, too, would transcend human experience. But he chose the pursuit of pleasure and beauty and brought ruin to himself and

“Priam, and the race of Priam skilled with the spear.”

And this brings the Iliad wholly within human experience.

Looking about me in the divine hours of summer, when the world is still as young as it was at Creation's dawn, I find in this everyday life the possibilities of every poem that ever was written or dreamed. And enfolding them all, I am aware of the great epic of life that at once fascinates and eludes the imagination.

Realizing that Nature is the source of all wealth, all power, all thought and all inspiration, there are times when I feel resentful towards the world of men. Those who live nearest to Nature have been at all times the least respected. They have been the drudges and slaves of society, producing the

AROUND HOME

absolute necessities of life and commended only when content with their down-trodden lot. Of course, there are many who will hasten to assure me that this condition of affairs is rapidly passing away. The farmer is respected as never before, and Governments are doing things for him. That is just the trouble. Governments are doing a little for the farmer, while he is doing everything of real importance for the rest of the world. But some day there may be a great change. When education has penetrated to every corner of the land there may be a great awakening. Instead of being thankful for the trifles that are handed down to him, the farmer will look more critically at the things he sends up to his masters. He may realize that, being the true producer, the best of his products should be for his own use. Realizing that power is in his hands he may decide to wield it. If such a day should come the wisdom that will guide the world will well up from nature instead of being handed down from the arid heights of superior intellect. Up to the present history has consisted largely of a record of the world's mistakes, and the best Government has been the one that has done the least harm. But if men should ever learn to cultivate their minds and souls they would cultivate their fields to better advantage, and we should probably begin to have Governments that would be valued for the good they do rather than for the evil they leave undone. Poetry and art would find their ancient inspiration in greater volume and cease to be cabined and cribbed by outworn

AROUND HOME

dogmas and cant phrases. It is because I feel that we are moving towards a greater and better day, and that mankind is soon to be renewed, by contact with the soil, that I endure with as much patience as possible the false ideals, mad pursuits, hideous cruelties and miseries of the present. The more swiftly we move in our pursuit of wealth, the more astounding we make the barbaric splendors of our prosperity, and the more mercilessly we pursue our selfish purposes the sooner we shall bring on the crisis that will end this sick phase of the world's life. Mankind is "going back to the land" as surely as day follows night, and in the new order that will be established by renewed strength and greater enlightenment the glories of to-day will be something to wonder at and perhaps pity.

When The Rain Came

WHEN the rain came! How shall I write or say or sing or in any way tell what joy there was in our little world when the rain came? For weeks the sun had been pouring down intolerable heat, and the springs went dry and the grass withered and all signs failed. It was in vain that we studied the sunsets of gold and cinnabar and dawns of pearl and chrysoprase. The fountains of the deep were sealed. The noonday was a furnace and

AROUND HOME

there was no relief in the night. Never before in the memory of man had there been such heat and drouth, and the farmers themselves began to look as if they would dry up and blow away, they were so tanned and sunburned and heat-scorched by work in the hayfields. The cattle panted under the shrivelling shade trees and scarcely lifted their heads when little whirlwinds sucked up the dust from the burned pastures. The birds sang, but their music was almost an irritation in that fever and swelter. Heat, heat, nothing but sunshine and heat through the long insufferable day, and still heat in the sleepless, dewless night. Surely the land had been forgotten or a curse had been put upon it. And then the rain came!

* * * *

What do the people who live in cities know of the infinite blessing of rain? A passing watercart or a squirting garden hose satisfies their shrivelled needs. But with us in the country it is different. When we need rain we need rivers and oceans of it, and this time we needed it as never before. And just as hope was beginning to fail thunderheads began to push up along the horizon. But the rain did not come. Time and again storms gathered in the west, but those who were watching reported drearily: "Gone to the north," or "Gone to the south." Sometimes a wide-winged storm would cast its shadow over us and sprinkle us with a few big drops and a cool wind would blow from it, but there is little satisfaction in being cooled with the wind from other people's rain.

AROUND HOME

After some days of this teasing, a storm came that somehow could not slip off to the north or to the south. It came at us squarely with a front like Niagara and a great rushing wind before it. It crackled with thunder and blazed with lightning, and the first downpour was mingled with hail. It lasted for only a few minutes, but while it lasted it was a veritable cloud-burst. The spouting eaves could not carry all their treasure, but overflowed in splashing and tinkling rivulets. And the murmur we heard was not all of the falling rain. It was full of the thanksgiving of the grass and of the leaves that were held up like cupped palms to catch the reviving shower. When the cloud passed and the sun came out a great sigh of relief seemed to go up from all nature and once more the music of the birds was grateful and sweet to hear.

* * * *

But though the first shower was good it was but a sup to the thirsty earth. An hour after it had fallen there was not even a puddle left for the children to paddle in with bare feet, but the corn-leaves had uncurled and were shining with tender green. The next day was hot, but early in the afternoon great clouds began to pile in the sky and storms began to pass to the north and south. Presently one came to us, and when it had passed the children saw for the first time in their lives a perfect rainbow. It arched the sky magnificently, but we rejected its promise of fair weather. We wanted more rain, and realized as never before the wisdom

AROUND HOME

of the words that Agur, the son of Jakeh, spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal: "There are three things that are never satisfied—yea four things that say not, 'It is enough.' " And one of these four things is "the earth that is not filled with water." Fortunately our hope was not disappointed. The rainbow as a sign of fair weather proved as false as all the signs that had failed us when it was dry. The next day came hot and steamy, with thunder rumbling in the distance and a curtain of clouds overhead. All day it continued to get darker and at last a still rain came from the south. It was one of those satisfying downpours that soak in as they fall, and it brought peace and healing and renewed life. And we knew that the land had not been forgotten and that there was not a curse upon it.

* * * *

While sitting listening to the rain I felt that I, too, was being refreshed and revived. Scraps of poetry floated through my memory, murmurous and melodious, and when the wind stirred it brought memories of the sea—not of the sea when tempestuous and plangent, but of the soothing hours when

"The sea with its soft susurrus
Comes up through the ivory gate."

One poem above all others seemed to fit my mood, and I began to piece it together as line by line it came back to me. It was Henry Kendall's wonderful poem which I had clipped from a paper

AROUND HOME

years ago and had unconsciously committed to memory through many readings:

“The song that once I dreamt about,
The tender, touching thing,
As radiant as the rose without—
The love of wind and wing—
The perfect verses to the tune
Of woodland music set,
As beautiful as afternoon,
Remain unwritten yet.”

At first I could not understand why this particular poem was haunting me, but presently I understood. It is interwoven with the imagery of the rain. Listen to this:

“It is too late to write them now,
The ancient fire is cold,
No ardent lights illumine the brow
As in the days of old.
I cannot dream the dream again:
But when the happy birds
Are singing in the sunny rain
I think I hear its words.

I think I hear the echo still
Of long-forgotten tones,
When evening winds are on the hill
And sunset fires the cones.
But only in the hours supreme,
With songs of land and sea,
The lyrics of the leaf and stream,
This echo comes to me.

No longer doth the earth reveal
Her gracious green and gold;
I sit where youth was once and feel
That I am growing old.

AROUND HOME

The lustre from the face of things
Is wearing all away;
Like one who beats with tired wings,
I rest and muse to-day.

But in the night and when the rain
The troubled torrent fills,
I often think I see again
The river in the hills.
And when the day is very near,
And birds are on the wing,
My spirit fancies it can hear
The song I cannot sing."

* * * *

The night closed in with the warm rain pouring from the chambers of the south, and when I went to bed in the tent I could hear it beating over me. It was a good sound, a sleepy sound, and more soothing than "poppies and mandragora and all the drowsy sirops of the world." In the morning the rain-drenched earth was glistening with moisture, and I went to the cornfield to cultivate. It was a joy to work the ground in the condition it was in, and I went at it with a will. Although the corn is no better than it should be after the long dry spell, I have broken up the "capillaries" and have a "dust mulch" in that field that scientific farmers would come miles to see if they knew about it. The weather is cool, and it looks as if the rain were over for a while, but we have had enough for the present, and already the drouth is almost forgotten. It was terrible while it lasted, but everything was filled with new life "when the rain came."

AROUND HOME

Waldemar

EVERY summer we make it a practice to place the hens that have families of young chickens in coops in the new orchard. This places them where they will not be robbed at feeding time by the other free-ranging hens and also keeps them from haunting the lawn, after the manner of motherly hens that are always looking for food for their offsprings. On the whole, the plan has been satisfactory, though on several occasions the young chickens have been raided by night-working enemies. At breakfast time this morning there was a commotion in the neighbourhood of the coops and I was called to the door because a hawk was swooping around and the old hens were squawking. Before there was time to get out a rifle and take a shot at the raider, a couple of king-birds attacked the hawk and we had the pleasure of watching them beat it away and drive it to the woods. After breakfast we found that one motherly old Rock hen had come home with her flock. Apparently she wanted the protection of living close to human beings. But she was not wanted at the kitchen door, so she and her flock were driven back to their own stamping ground in the new orchard. About an hour later she was back with her flock. It was quite clear that she had made up her mind that the orchard was no place for a hen with a grow-

AROUND HOME

ing family. A consultation was called and while we were discussing the problem Waldemar, the pet crow, hopped out on the lawn and began to "caw" for his breakfast. Then things began to happen. That sorely tried Plymouth Rock hen went right up in the air and landed on poor Waldemar with both feet, both wings, her beak and all the power of her lungs. Waldemar yelled for help and tried to defend himself with beating wings, but I believe that if I had not been there the old hen would have killed him.

After beating off an attack by a hawk in the field, she was in no humour to take chances with a crow on the lawn. Three times she tried to return to the attack, and was only driven off when her frightened family took refuge under the black-currant bushes. She joined them there and as hastily as possible clucked them together and led them off to the barn. Poor Waldemar didn't seem to know what was the matter. He hopped about the lawn and cawed lustily, and the more he cawed the faster the old hen led away her flock. She hasn't returned to the house since. So it may be that Waldemar will earn his keep by frightening the hens and chickens away from the house and the flower-beds, where they certainly are not wanted.

Now that I spend a good part of my time in the tent in the woodlot, I am beginning to get acquainted with the other inhabitants of the farm. The birds and squirrels are beginning to realize that my intentions are not hostile, and show signs of accepting me into the fellowship of nature. One

AROUND HOME

day recently a black squirrel came and sat on a branch not twenty feet from the opening of the tent and told me his troubles.

“Ku - kuk - Kwanh! Kwanh! Kwanh!”

I listened respectfully, and he told his story over and over until he probably thought he had impressed it on my mind. Then he hopped down to the ground and went on with his work of finding edible tidbits and nibbling daintily. A short time afterward a young robin came along and walked through the tent in a series of little spurts—stopping every few feet to look at me. As nothing more dangerous than a fountain pen was moving, he showed no alarm, and after making an investigation that did not yield any food, passed out under the edge of the tent, where it was raised to admit the breeze. Another time a ground sparrow came in and paid no more attention to me than if I did not exist, and made a complete survey of the ground enclosed by the tent.

* * * *

Strawberries!

STRAWBERRIES are in! Not the kind that you get in even the best hotels—soft, dinted berries with occasional spots in them, that are a stage or two past ripeness—but glorious, fresh, dewy, red strawberries of the kind that you get

AROUND HOME

only when you go out to the garden and pick them for yourself. There are people—I even find them on this farm—who commit the gastronomic crime of adding Jersey cream to berries of this kind. All I want or can endure is a powdering of sugar and a complete absence of conversation while the full flavour of the berries is being enjoyed. But I must not be too hard on those who mix cream with strawberries—mixing the acid with the fat and casein of the cream and laying the foundations of indigestion—for there are extenuating circumstances. When I got home the dinner table was crowned with a strawberry shortcake—one of the kind in which exactly the right kind of cake is smothered with ripe crushed strawberries—and the cream jug was circulating freely. The cake seemed to demand cream, even if the strawberries did not, and I could not resist. While it is just possible that certain discomforts experienced later were due to the mingling of the acid and cream, I am not entirely certain that they were not due to repletion from eating too much of that lordly shortcake. Just as the asparagus season closed we walked right into the strawberry season, and other delights are in prospect. Besides the raspberries in the garden there are wild raspberries and thimbleberries developing in the woodlot. There are times when it seems to me that there would be fewer people deserting the country for the city if more attention were paid to the farm gardens.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

The World of Life

ANOTHER thing that has a deeper meaning than the mere words suggest is the much-debated difference between the city and the country. And when the hidden truth is realized, it is hard to explain. But having finally realized the difference to my own satisfaction at least, I shall try to explain.

To begin with, the cleavage is not between city and country but between civilization and life. City and country are now much alike in their devotion to money, power—in fact to all the root vices of the Seven Deadly Sins. The cities educate the country to extravagance, luxury, fashions and all their own follies so as to get a home market for the products that keep so great a part of labour employed. The country takes to all this gladly and pays for it with food and raw materials. So the only difference between them is that of people who are trading with one another and driving hard bargains whenever they get the chance. But the traditional difference between the city and country is believed to be due to the fact that “God made the country. Man made the town.” Yet the country as it stands to-day is just as much man-made as the town. Nevertheless, there is still a difference—a difference that forever draws part of humanity one way and part another. Perhaps the best way to explain what that difference is will be

AROUND HOME

to tell as simply as possible how I came to realize it.

One morning I wakened at dawn. As the boys and I sleep in a tent my morning outlook was through an open tent-flap rather than through a window. My first awakening was only sufficient to enable me to realize that it was not yet necessary for me to get up. But I had enjoyed a satisfying sleep and soon I was, or seemed to be, wholly awake, and looking at the scene before me with half-closed eyes. There was no smoke issuing from the chimney of the one farmhouse that was within my vision. Cattle and horses in an intervening field were pasturing quietly. The only thing that seemed active was a blue-jay in some nearby elms. It was flying from branch to branch and uttering its shrill cries, which were being answered by other jays in the orchard. I began to reflect quietly that although man was not yet astir, everything in Nature was awake and going about its business as if man did not exist.

Then suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, everything was changed. It was such a change as happens when you are looking at the arrangement of squares—or is it cubes?—that they use to demonstrate some point in optics. Not a line in the picture has been changed and yet the whole arrangement of the picture seems to have been changed.

As I looked out I saw that only Nature was really of importance in the world. The whole prospect seemed flooded with abundant life and the

AROUND HOME

work of man—the fields, buildings, and stubble lands—seemed but temporary blemishes that Nature would quickly heal if left to herself. The grass was growing, birds were singing and feeding, insects were fluttering, and all the infinite varied activities of Nature were going on as if man did not exist. I saw that Nature is sufficient to herself. Her life is a mighty flood encircling the globe, and man is only an incident. And as I watched, thrilled like one who witnesses secret mysteries, I felt that over it all there brooded a spirit that was intensely aware—One without whose knowledge not even a sparrow could fall to the ground unnoticed. At that moment I became overwhelmingly convinced that man has little part in this fundamental life. His activities and his civilization seemed very remote and unimportant. Even his proudest cities are but flotsam in some eddy by the side of this stream of life. Like others before them they had been thrown off from this stream and in time would fall back into it. The stream has endured unchanged since before the dawn of human consciousness. To it all nations and all dynasties have been equally transient and unimportant.

And as I lay in silence, looking at that stream of life—strangely submerged in it—I understood the secret longings of my own soul. It was to be in accord with this immortal and healing life that I had returned from the cities—from civilization—again and again. But never before had I realized what I had been seeking until this supreme mo-

AROUND HOME

ment. At last I was in accord—visibly, audibly and sensibly—with the life that has been and will be—with the Unchanging.

For days the new point of view remained with me. It was then that I realized that the cleavage is between this life and the human activities that we call civilization. I realized that the aspirations and hopes of one in accord with this life are in every way different to those of one in accord with so-called human progress. My interest was not in the fluctuations of the financial market or the pursuit of wealth, but in the seedtime and the harvest and my chief concern—like that of the creatures of the earth, was with matters of food and shelter and the little affairs of those who are dear to me. The only wealth that interested me was the wealth of life and of being in accord with the infinite life by which I was surrounded. The currency of that life is effort, rather than gold. Those who are in accord partake of life rather than of business prosperity. And at all times there is healing of soul in being merged into that life without losing one's personality.

But the state of being in accord with the universal life is not constant. Civilization has its undoubted claims. Taxes must be paid—we must render unto Caesar. So from time to time the picture shifts and I am back in the world of men and facing the problems of civilization. At such times I take a roaring interest in politics, plan for better crops and bigger barns and discuss economic problems over the roadside fence with passing thinkers

AROUND HOME

who are wrought up about such matters. But ever there is the refuge of a plunge back into the stream of life—the solace of communion with it. When my magic picture shifts back to the life-view, the Capital seems as far away as Karnak and the Government of the day as remote as the Government of Lycurgus. And seeing things from the life side of the line begets an almost shameless tolerance. How can one be wrathful when he knows that the mistakes of civilization are mistakes of blindness? There are even times when humour creeps in and one cannot help smiling to see that the blind are still leading the blind—in fact that the most aggressively blind have now organized and are insisting more than ever in leading the blind. They stumble against one another in their spiritual darkness, grapple with one another under the delusion that they are overcoming monsters of ignorance and evil.

So the sum of the matter seems to be that there is no real difference between the town and country but there is a difference that needs to be bridged and harmonized between Civilization and Life. To me the opportunity for a perfect accord is great but the self-elected blindness of civilized people prevents its realization. People are so wise that they misunderstand all their teachers, prophets and philosophers who have tasted of life. Take the case of Emerson, for instance. He advised us to hitch our “waggon to a star.” Everybody applauds, and promptly goes out and selects Aldebaran or Betelgeuse or the Dog Star and tries to

AROUND HOME

spin out traces to reach it. A much simpler and more practical way of following this sound piece of advice is open to everyone—indeed if its truth is once realized it is inescapable. Long since it dawned on me that this earth on which we live is a planet—a star—and I have hitched my little wagon to it. The result has been very satisfying and suggests wonderful possibilities.

Fresh Fish

EVER since I can remember fresh fish has been a luxury in this part of the country. In the old days the roads were barely passable in the spring and only occasionally would a fisherman from Cashmere (better known as Suckertown) come peddling fish. The mullets and suckers that he offered for sale would not be highly regarded in modern restaurants, but I have yet to taste a Dover sole or a North River planked shad that tasted better than these humble fish tasted after a winter diet of salt herring, corned beef and salt pork. So when the horn of the fisherman is heard in the land I sit up and take notice. Nowadays it is an automobile horn that is sounded, instead of the old dinner horn, but it gives the same old thrill of anticipation. The result of this form of rapid transit is that instead of mullet and suckers from the muddy Thames we now get herring and occasional perch and whitefish from Lake Erie. I

AROUND HOME

know I should have included pickerel in that list, but I left it out purposely—and thereby hangs a tale. Though I was always ready to welcome the fish-man and to buy if he had any of the first-named fish, I drew the line at pickerel.

The other fish I could scale and clean and prepare for the pan without too much trouble, but a couple of unpleasant experiences with pickerel years ago put me off them forever. The idea was fixed in my mind that it is easier to skin them than to scale them, and that a man can't do either without getting cut, scratched and jabbed with the spines on their backs.

When the fish man sounded his horn at the edge of the lawn on Monday, I picked up a platter and went out to him in a hopeful spirit, for we were all fish-hungry. Only once before this season had we enjoyed fresh fish.

"Any herring?" I asked.

"No; but we have some fine blue ones."

"Blue ones. What do you mean?"

"Pickerel."

"Nothing doing!"

Then followed an argument, in which I made it clear that, although pickerel are excellent fish on the table, I did not care to undertake the risks and pains of preparing them for the pan. The sum of it all was that the fish-man finally turned to his companion who was driving the car and asked:

"Will you show him how to dress these fish?"

"Sure, I will," said the chauffeur, who happened to be a professional fisherman. "Where is your butcher knife?"

AROUND HOME

I got the butcher knife and led the way to an old table back of the coal shed where I usually have my sessions with fish, poultry, and other unpleasant jobs incidental to the simple life.

* * * *

"Pickerel are not hard to scale," said the fisherman with a confidence born of a life-long experience.

Grasping the fish firmly by the head with his left hand he took the butcher knife in his right and gave a few swift, strong scrapes from the tail to the gills. I would never dare to do that, for as a boy I learned from rhyme and experience that

"Whittle from yourself, never cut yourself;
Whittle to yourself, always cut yourself."

A slip of the knife might sever his hand at the wrist, but it never slipped. After scraping the scales from the side on which he began he flopped over the fish and scaled the other side.

"Now, here is where most people have their trouble," he said, as he tapped the butcher knife on the spiny fins along the back. "They try to cut them off, when they should cut them out." Then he proceeded to demonstrate. As the butcher knife was not so sharp as it should be, he took my pocket knife and made a cut along the back beside the fins and sloping toward the centre. Then he did the same on the other side of the fins. This took out the spiny fins and a small ridge of flesh.

"That not only takes out the fins, but a row of little bones that are troublesome," he said, as he went on with his demonstration.

AROUND HOME

Still holding the fish firmly by the head he turned it on its back, made a cut with the butcher knife about half an inch above the vent and then sliced toward the tail, cutting away the vent and a little fin. One swift stroke cut off the tail. Turning the fish end for end he slipped the knife under a side fin and sliced up to the gills. After doing the same on the other side he slipped the knife under the two little fins on the under side and sliced them off toward the gills. Then a single stroke cut off the head and the loosened fins. Inserting the knife at the head he opened the fish and removed the "innards." All this took less time than it has taken me to tell it. In fact, we timed him on the last four fish and found that without undue haste he dressed them in three and a half minutes. After seeing him do the trick I think I shall now be able to attend to pickerel, though I am afraid I shall be a trifle nervous about scraping off the scales with a sharp butcher knife without some protection for my wrist. That "whittle to yourself, always cut yourself" jingle still sticks in my mind as a sound piece of wisdom.

Socrates

FOR the past hour I have seen, smelt and felt more of Socrates, the wise ram, than I really wanted to. We had to put a new tongue in the disc harrow, and it had been hauled into the pasture

AROUND HOME

field for that purpose. Socrates was with the sheep and lambs under a shade tree about twenty rods away when we began the job, and at once decided to investigate. He did not want to bunt anyone, but he was just as curious as one of the children to see how everything was done. He crowded into the circle that was busy boring holes in the tongue and adjusting bolts. At times there were as many as five heads touching one another when a difficult bolt was being wrestled with, and the head of Socrates was often the nearest to it. He certainly was curious about everything. It was useless to drive him away, for he would come right back at once. Sometimes it was rather startling to raise one's head when the wrench had slipped to find that the head nearest was that of Socrates. And, besides smelling like a wool warehouse, he radiated heat like a furnace. But we had to put up with him until the job was done. When not crowding into the busy circle—or rather into the circle where one was busy and the rest were looking on—he amused himself by picking up bolts and nuts in his mouth, and once or twice was suspected of swallowing them, but, as they all turned up when hunted for, he was not guilty. Possibly he learned something by watching so closely while the work was being done, but that did not make him any the less a nuisance.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

Our First Airship

EXCITEMENT? Well, I should say so! There hasn't been so much excitement on the farm since the red cow fell into an open well. And the trouble is by no means local. A streak of excitement about ten miles wide extends clean across Western Ontario. People are waving their arms and all talking at the same time. Neighbours who have been too busy to visit one another all summer, are visiting just now and talking their heads off. And it is all because an airship—a really, truly airship—went over the country this morning. Ever since the war broke out there have been dream airships going over—mostly at night. Emotional people would pick out a bright star near the horizon and after looking at it for a while, would convince themselves that it was the light of an airship, and would promptly start stories about German spies. Before the Ontario Temperance Act went into force, men who had stopped late in town, to sit up with a sick friend, would tell their patient wives about the strange colored lights they saw in the sky that must have been the lights of an airship—though I sometimes suspected that if they were telling the truth what they saw must have been a drug store flying across the country hunting for a good corner site in a prosperous village. But none of the previous airship stories were believed by all the people. There were always sceptics who winked and tapped their foreheads significantly.

AROUND HOME

Now, however, everyone must believe for the airship went over in the daytime, and those who didn't see it heard it and wondered what on earth was making the racket, though it never occurred to them to look up into the sky. I am not afraid to tell about this airship, for I saw it myself before the ninth hour, and if necessary I can have the story backed by hundreds of witnesses.

* * * *

The boys and I were poking around doing the morning chores when we heard what we thought was a particularly asthmatic "Tin Lizzie" coming along the concession line. This did not surprise us any, as automobiles usually pass every few minutes, and some of them make considerable noise. As the noise increased in volume we thought an auto must be coming to visit us, and stopped to look down the sideroad and up the lane. But there was nothing in sight. Then one of the boys suggested that what we were hearing was the new county tractor that is busy plowing on a farm about half a mile away. This explanation seemed satisfactory, and we went back to our work. But presently a great buffet of sound came down the wind, and it suddenly dawned on me that I had heard that sound before—once in Toronto and once in Detroit. As I was under the spruce trees at the time I called out:

"It must be an airship!"

Instantly there was a wild yell from a boy who was working in the open where he could see the sky.

"There it is!"

[96]

AROUND HOME

Then the riot started. Everyone started yelling for everyone else to come out and see the airship. There it was in the sky to the south, with both planes visible. It was so high and far away that it seemed to be almost stationary. Someone got the opera glasses and we all got a hurried look at the marvel. Everyone was yelling and talking at once and the collie was dancing around and barking. As a rule he chased all the hawks, crows and cranes that pass over, but this man-bird was too big and noisy to be attacked. The littlest boy was taking a bowl of milk to the cellar when the airship was sighted, and he stood watching it with the milk slopping on his bare toes. We could hear the children of the neighbourhood whooping and men who were working in the fields were yelling to attract the attention of the folks in the houses so they would come out to see the exhibition. The airship was probably in sight for about five minutes before it finally disappeared in the west, along the railway line. When disappearing it looked like a giant hawk.

* * * *

Of course, there are many people in the country who have seen airships at the exhibitions and important fall fairs, but to most of the children it was something new. Even though I had seen one before, it did not seem so exciting and wonderful. Seen over a city, they are but a part of the many exciting things, but to one out here in a quiet country, the airship had the whole stage to itself. Its unusual appearance, like a giant dragon-fly, and its

AROUND HOME

portentous roar made it easily the most amazing sight ever witnessed from these fields. As it went over,

“Above the flight of Pegasean wing,”

it seemed hard to believe that it was a human achievement. Its flight was so smooth and steady that it made the birds appear ridiculous by comparison. As it was disappearing, a robin followed along its course, and its flight looked struggling and absurd. A small blue heron that went flapping along the Government drain looked like an early and hardly successful experiment in the art of flying. As the United States is now our ally, no one suspected the visitor of being an enemy spy, and we were all eager to see to-morrow's papers, to see if they will have any news about the birdman, and why he gave us an exhibition. We all hope that he had a good trip, though I am afraid he found the roads rather cloudy, for it started to rain a few minutes after he passed. It is doubtful if he will make many trips that will cause as much excitement and pleasure as when he passed over the quiet country. As I write, I hear a boy singing jubilantly, the words and music being evidently his own:

“A hawk and a crane
And an aeroplane
Have both been in my sight.
Brr-r-r-r! Wow! Whooppee!”

The lyric ends with a squeal of delight that I cannot imitate with words or letters. The coming of the first aeroplane will be a long-remembered event with him and with many others.

The Solitude of Rain

B EING something of an amateur in solitude, I always enjoy discovering a new kind. I have enjoyed the solitude of open fields, of deep woods, of a mountain-top—or at least of a great hill, for I am no mountain climber—of a starry winter night, of a midsummer dawn, of a mountain lake, and even the depressing solitude of an alien crowd. And yesterday I enjoyed the solitude of a great rain. All morning I had been working in my tent in the woods and for some hours had been so still that the trees had forgotten I was there. Even the black-squirrel that has built his summer nest of leaves in the nearest maple, about twenty feet above my head, was hopping about grubbing for his dinner without giving me a thought. Then the rain came—a still summer downpour without wind or thunder and lightning. I looked up from my work—and then found that I could not return to it. The woods seemed to be suddenly alive with a life with which I was not familiar. The beating of the rain on the leaves sounded like the murmur of innumerable voices speaking a language I did not know. The falling rain broke into a mist or gathered on the leaves and fell in great drops. As I listened the conviction grew that the trees and shrubs and flowers and weeds were expanding to enjoy the solitude. They felt safe from intrusion and espial, for no human creature would be about in such a

AROUND HOME

storm. Suddenly I realized that I was an alien in the midst of a timorous life that had a capacity to enjoy, even more than I, the communion of nature. I realized more than ever the conceit which makes man regard the world as anthropocentric. With his limited intelligence he dares to think that his life is the only one that matters in a world where all things are alive—or rather where life is continuous and takes on many forms, of which man is only one. Why should not the trees be the central and most important life form? For certainly they are more imposing in appearance and infinitely more numerous than men. In the solitude of the rain I felt that I was the only living thing that was self-centred and alone. When the rain passed all things resumed their shy reticence.

* * * *

The Militant Pig

HOW does a pig fight? How does a wild boar charge at his hunters? Here is a question that will perhaps puzzle people who have been brought up on a farm. There is a country expression, "You can't fool me about pigs; I was brought up among them." But I would not be surprised if many who use this expression would be fooled if they were asked this question suddenly. My interest in it is due to being reminded of an old bit of folklore which describes a pig's fighting methods.

AROUND HOME

A visitor and I were watching Bildad trying to drive a little pig of about his own age. The pig squared off at him and approached sideways, gnashing imaginary tusks that would never do in reality on an animal that is being fed to grade "select." My visitor laughed at the futile fight, for the pig had no tusks, and Bildad has not yet learned to make full use of his teeth. Then he remarked: "I remember hearing my father say of a man, 'He walked sideways, like a hog going to war.' " I remembered at once having heard the same descriptive touch years ago. The action of the little pig fighting with the pup showed that it was founded on true observation. I remembered, though I could not locate it, a description of a charge by a wild boar in which it was stated that the boar passed his victim and gashed him with his tusk when passing. After the charge he kept on running and disappeared. This started me wondering if the poets and writers who have described the hunting of wild boars were as true in their observations as the unknown phrasemaker who coined the expression quoted. I turned to Shakespeare to see how Adonis had been killed by the boar, but found that the poet had avoided describing the actual attack. Then I hunted for *Quentin Durward* to find how Sir Walter Scott described the wild boar's attack on King Louis. But, alas! the volume had been loaned to someone. If I remember rightly, the boar was described as charging straight at the King when *Quentin Durward* intervened. Anyway, there is no doubt that the folk-lore des-

AROUND HOME

cription is correct. No phrase would pass current from generation to generation unless it was founded on fact.

It would be interesting to study our domestic animals to find how many of their wild instincts still survive. The little pigs that have outgrown tusks, or have had them bred out of the strain to which they belong, still go into a fight in the way that was natural to the tusked of the forests. I remember seeing a litter of little pigs drop instantly and all together to hide in long grass at a warning grunt from their mother. It is probable that they remember these instincts in their youth more than when they are mature. When they grow up they concentrate their minds on feeding troughs and swill pails, to the exclusion of all other ideas and impulses. The turkey has been domesticated so recently that it still retains its wild habits. A turkey hen with young poults will seek an open space in which to spend the night. I have been told that this is a habit of wild turkeys. They do it so that they can watch for enemies in every direction and in case of attack can scatter easily. The tame turkeys also teach their young to fly up to roosts as soon as possible, so as to be safe from prowling skunks and foxes. Well-fed horses and sheep will paw through snow to nibble at the grass, as was the habit of their wild ancestors. Dogs will turn around several times before lying down at night—a habit which, I am told, they inherit from wolfish ancestors that used to trample down the long grass for a bed in this way. It is probable that if we

AROUND HOME

knew thoroughly the habits of the wild ancestors of all our domestic animals and fowls we should find them in their domesticated descendants, although their usefulness has departed.

* * * *

Bildad has discovered the use of his voice and promises to be a barker of much volume. This morning he was lying beside the door when a neighbour walked up. As the pup was not expecting visitors, he let out a roar that startled the whole household and brought us all running to see what was the matter. No one can now approach the house without arousing a warning bark from our self-important watch-dog. He takes himself very seriously, but he will have to learn just when and at what he should bark. Yesterday he began to bark furiously, and when I went to see what was the matter I found him barking at the cows that were fully forty rods away in the pasture field. It seems to give him a sense of power and authority to be able to bark, but he lacks discrimination. He barks at every automobile that passes on the road, and there are times when he is a very busy and noisy dog. We must teach him that it is enough to bark at automobiles that turn into the lane, so that we can have time to get on our coats before visitors arrive. At first I thought I would have to put up a sign in the lane—"Keep Off the Pup"—but he seems to have a very proper fear of cars. As he barks at them he backs away under the rose bushes or lilacs where they will not be likely to follow him. As he now turns the tips of his ears forward when

AROUND HOME

his attention is attracted to anything, Bildad is beginning to look very knowing and intelligent.

* * * *

Here is something new. It looks as if automobiles were going to take the place of horses in more ways than one. I have just heard of a man who was trying to trade off a wind-broken and spavined automobile, and he adopted the method of the horse-trader. I am not sufficiently posted about automobiles to tell exactly what he did, but I remember that he stopped leaks in the radiator with soap and ginger (why ginger?) and reinforced the brakes with strips of leather so that he was able to put his knock-kneed old machine through its paces and make it show off like a two-year-old. I suppose the next thing that we will hear about will be that the gypsies now take broken-down automobiles along when going through the country, so that they may trade autos with farmers who think they are smart and know all about Ford flesh. Trading doctored automobiles should furnish opportunities to chauffeuring David Harums of the future, and I have no doubt we shall hear all the old horse-trading stories retold and brought up to date. Instead of the man who started out in the fall with one old horse and finished in the spring with a span of Clydes and boot money in the bank, we shall hear of a man who started in the spring with a clattering flivver and ended in the fall with a Rolls-Royce and an interest in a bootlegging business. The world certainly moves.

A Berry-Picker's Conscience

TO PICK berries successfully, one must have a berry-picker's conscience. People who lack it are all the time catching sight of more luscious and bigger berries farther on in the patch and trampling down the canes in an attempt to reach them. And when they reach them they find they are no better than those they trampled under foot. But they are sure to see some loaded bushes a little further on, and they continue their destructive trampling. And in the end they have only a skimpy scattering of berries in the bottom of their baskets. On the other hand, the person with a well-developed berry-picker's conscience picks every berry in reach before moving on. Little ones must be picked as well as big ones before the conscience is satisfied. Picking in this way is highly efficient, and after about an hour of it you will be surprised at the fine mess of berries you have. But, above all, you will be surprised at the enjoyment you will get from the berries you pick yourself. As a human being with an appetite that craves epicurean delights, I freely own that I derive more gustatory satisfaction from natural luxuries that I gather for myself than from anything else that comes to the table—whether it be at home or in restaurants. If you want to know all the flavour there is in wild raspberries, go out to the wilds and pick them for yourself and sugar them to your own taste. If you let other people pick them for you, they never taste

AROUND HOME

the same. Tame raspberries are good enough for tame people, but those who hear the call of the wild want wild raspberries that they pick for themselves. And if they pick them conscientiously, without wasting any by trampling and carelessness, they will enjoy them even more.

The Mocking-Bird

CALLOO! Callay! O frabjous day! Yesterday will be marked henceforth in my calendar as my "frabjous day." Yesterday afternoon I had a visitor at my tent in the woodlot, a wonderful visitor—the nonpareil of all possible visitors. A mocking-bird came and broadcast a concert from a stag-topped maple a few rods from my tent. It was the most marvellous outpouring of bird song that I have ever listened to. I am no longer envious of those people in Great Britain who heard the song of a nightingale by wireless. I should like to have heard that, of course, but having heard a mocking-bird at what must have been his best, or near it, for I cannot imagine better, I feel that my life has not been entirely wasted.

Some time in the afternoon a boy who was harrowing-in millet came to the opening of my tent and asked:

"What is a mocking-bird like?"

"As nearly as I can remember the descriptions of it I have read, it is a dull grey bird, with some white feathers and a long tail."

AROUND HOME

"Well, a bird that looks like that has been singing in a thorn tree in the next field. He beats the brown thrasher all hollow."

That was enough. I went with him to investigate. When we got near enough to hear the rush of whistles and liquid notes I knew that, in any case, the stranger was a musician of marvellous range and power. Presently he fluttered out of the thorn tree and lit on a stump. We were then able to observe the markings that we found later, on consulting a bird book, were those of the mocking-bird. The boy tried to go around him and shoo him toward the woodlot, but he flew to an elm in the field and did some more singing—quite evidently imitating a robin and adding joyous flourishes of his own. At last he stopped, and although we looked through the tree from every side we could not catch sight of him again.

Returning to my tent I felt satisfied that the stranger was a mocking-bird, and was well pleased. Back at work I forgot about him. But after a while I became aware of a perfect rain of music coming down through the fresh green leaves. Stepping out of the tent, I began to search for my visitor. Moving as noiselessly as possible toward the direction from which the music was coming, I searched the leaves and branches for the little grey bird. Presently I met the boy who had been sowing millet. He was also hunting for the musician. Stepping out of the woods into the field, we both spied him at the same moment. He was perched on a dead branch of a stag-topped maple. His

AROUND HOME

music never stopped for an instant. We recognized the songs—with embellishments—of the robin and red-winged blackbird and the notes of hawks, bluejays, highholers, quail, grackles and others, and there was one song of exquisite sweetness so low that we could hardly hear it. There were many other songs that probably reproduced the notes of warblers with which we were not familiar. And woven through it all were joyous little trills and gurgles of music. While we listened the boy who had been harrowing joined us silently. The little musician would bound into the air occasionally and flutter down to another branch with outspread wings without interrupting his program. A couple of highholers flew up and lit beside him. They remained perfectly still and listened as we were listening. But apparently he did not want them about, for he stopped and chased them away. Then he sang for us again. How long we listened I cannot tell, but we got home almost an hour late for supper, and were told that we had been called three times. We had not heard—and yet hearing the call to meals is about the easiest thing we do.

Bird song,
Word song,
Who shall make them one?

Of course, it would be impossible, and one would be foolish to try. But I have thought of a way to suggest something of the marvel of the mocking-bird's song. He is a shameless plagiarist. Well, I can plagiarize, too, and the poets are full of beau-

AROUND HOME

tiful things about the birds. He mixes everything with mocking nonsense, and I can at least try to do that. Of course, I could get many beautiful quotations if I used an anthology, but that would not be sticking to the mocking-bird's method. He quotes from memory, and if he misquotes he doesn't bother his head about it. So here goes:

THE MOCKING-BIRD.

Humorist, plagiarist!
Laughing and chaffing!
Taking—remaking!
(Thief! Thief! Thief!)
Pitiless parodist!
There is no rapture
He cannot capture

Mock, throw away and recapture again!
Hark! Hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phoebus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at the springs
On chaliced flowers that lies.

(Parse it! Parse it! Tweedle-dee-dee!
Silly grammarian, see! see! see!)

And now it is all instruments,
And now a lonely flute,
And now it is an angel's song
That bids the heavens be mute.
(Or someone on a toot!
Hooch toot!)

That strain again, beside whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.
(Marlowe and Shakespeare! Mix 'em! Mix 'em!
That is the properest way to fix 'em!)
Bird of the wilderness,
Blithesome and cumberless,
Sweet be thy matins o'er moorland and lea.

AROUND HOME

(Tweedle! Tweedle! Tweedle-dee-dee!
Why have the poets neglected me?)
Shall I call thee bird
Or but a wandering voice?
(Take your choice!
Take your choice!)

The bluebird in the orchard
Is lyrical for her.
The starling with his meadow pipe
Sets all the fields astir.

(Carman! Carman! Bliss! Bliss! Bliss!
Did you ever hear such a song as this?)

'Tis sweet to dance to violins
When life and youth are fair,
To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes,
Is delicate and rare.

(Squawk! Squawk!
Beware of the hawk.)

Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,
Since over shady groves they hover.
(Oh, I have lost my little grey lover!
Shall I never see her again?)

This is the song I am singing of her!
Jug, jug, jug, jug, jug, jug, jug, jug! Teru!
Teru!)

The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
Beloved as thou art.

(Peter! Peter! Punkin eater,
Was there ever anything sweeter?
Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Ha.)

AROUND HOME

Uniparous

THE names of the animals and fowls on this farm are not what they used to be. They are beginning to show signs of over-sophistication. To name the collie pup Bildad was going far enough, but every day I am discovering something new. Now that Bildad is growing up and taking charge of the farm, his exploits furnish family conversation, but I admit that I was stumped when I was told that he had to be punished for chasing Uniparous. I groped unsuccessfully through my memory of the old Latin roots they used to teach out of a spelling-book that was used when I went to school. Uniparous was beyond me and I had to ask for help. I learned that a setting of Devonshire Games yielded only one chicken, hence "Uniparous—giving birth to only one." I admit that the name is rather catchy, but it is too deep for everyday use. Possibly the chicken will develop into a masterful gamecock and the name will be shortened to "Nip." At present Uniparous is receiving the whole attention of one Ancona hen, and in her quest for food she brought him to the flower-beds. Doing his duty as he saw it, Bildad rushed them, and it might have gone hard with Uniparous if he had not been rescued. It became necessary to impress on Bildad that young chickens are not to be attacked as roughly as old hens. I received my next shock when I was told that Bildad

[111]

AROUND HOME

had been chasing Abib and Karshish. I threw up my hands at once and was informed that Abib and Karshish are the spring calves. The naming of them records an unsuspected dip into Browning. The logic of the naming is not entirely clear. Though I put these names on record, I cannot say that I approve of them. But I am beginning to understand the careworn look that has been showing on the face of Bildad. Now that he is growing up and making himself useful—he is reported to be a glutton for work—he must find it hard to remember these names. If things keep on this way Bildad will need a college education before he can undertake to keep the other animals in order.

Poultry Notes

THE back-to-the-land movement under the feudal system had many advantages that are lacking in a democracy. When Messire Gawain grew weary of court life and sighed for simple joys, he donned his highly damascened habergeon of Harveyized steel, swung his blood-clotted big stick over his shoulder and rode forth into the wilderness to preempt a claim under the homestead act as it was then understood. When he found, as the High History would phrase it, "a right fair house and right rich that liketh him well," he proved his title with the big stick and took immediate possession. After giving the previous proprietor a

AROUND HOME

decent burial he shouted "What Ho!" and the retainers came in and did obeisance to him. After he explained what's what to everyone, from the seneschal to the base scullion, he ordered his dinner and everybody got busy. If he wanted chicken fricasse, he got it as quickly as was humanly possible, or someone got bashed with the club. In a democratic country things are ordered differently. Even after the back-to-the-lander gets located in a humble and legal way he finds that he has merely acquired the privilege of attending to his own wants. There is no one to respond to his imperative "What Ho!" and if he wants chicken fricasse he must go out and run down a hen himself and prepare her for the pot. He may flatter himself that he is the lord of the manor, but he finds that he is also the base scullion. And if it is that bad under a democratic system, what would it be under socialism? I have yet to find a socialist who can tell me who is going to dress and draw the poultry under his ideal regime.

I am moved to make these reflections by the fact that this is pre-eminently the poultry season on the farm. Now is the time when ducks are fat and the "star boarders" are being culled from the flock of hens. That sounds all right, but if there is no base scullion to attend to the job and you have to do it yourself a time soon comes when you begin to sigh for places where they serve table d'hôte dinners. Picking a duck that has an undershirt of eiderdown and a fresh crop of pin feathers is not my ideal of a pleasant forenoon's job. But I have learned that

AROUND HOME

there are tricks in all trades. I had a notion that all fowls had to be "dry-picked" just because I used to read advertisements of "Philadelphia dry-picked capons," but I have learned an easier way. For the benefit of back-to-the-landers who may be having experiences similar to mine I am going to pass it along. I know that dealers in poultry always assure you that the birds they handle have been dry picked, but don't be too sure about it. I have known farmers who supply poultry to the markets smile broadly when they hear this statement. Of course, turkeys are dry picked, for they are easy, but for ducks and hens scalding before picking is a great help. When you are ready to go at the job put the decapitated bird in a bucket. Take a kettle of boiling water and add to it just enough cold water to stop the boil. Then pour this over the fowl. Pull it out to give it air and then plunge it back to make the scalding thorough. Do this several times, and you will find that getting off the feathers is no trick at all. You can strip a hen in five minutes and a duck in but little longer. And then if you want to eliminate all traces of the scalding process just dip the newly-picked bird into ice water and hang it up to cool. This keeps the skin white. There are some further tricks practised by those who wish to palm off fowls that have been plucked in this way as dry picked, but far be it from me to help anyone in deceits of this kind. My sole purpose is to explain duck and chicken picking made easy.

Now you need not sniff superior and think that

AROUND HOME

work of this kind is beneath your dignity. Many a sportsman thinks it quite the thing to pluck the birds of his own killing while he blows to the women folk about the wonderful shots he made. And is there any real difference between plucking a wild duck and a tame one, a partridge or a hen? And there is most learned and poetic precedent for doing menial work of this kind. I remember a note on Hamlet by an ingenious annotator who surmised that Shakespeare himself used to dress the poultry for Mrs. Shakespeare. In no other way could he account for one of the most wonderful bits of observation shown by the poet. I never asked a biologist if it is true or not, but this annotator asserted that the pigeon has no gall-bag and that Shakespeare noticed the fact some centuries before the scientists. He makes Hamlet say:

"It cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter."

When preparing the ingredients of a pigeon pot pie the immortal bard noted the singular fact that he pigeon has no gall. And he would never have noticed it unless he had been looking after the giblets. After that no one need be ashamed if unexpected company catches him at the job of dressing the poultry for dinner.

AROUND HOME

How to Loaf

THIS afternoon I loafed—loafed with all my might. It was the first time since haying began that I really felt rested and fit, and I knew the time had come for me to have a healthful and profitable loaf. Most people loaf when they are tired out. That is a mistake. They are not loafing. They are convalescing. If you loaf when you are feeling strong and well, that is when you store up surplus energy and reserves of strength that will be of value to you in hard sessions later on. At least that is my theory of it, and until some learned scientist proceeds to smash it I shall continue to use my very best times for loafing. It is all right to drudge and toil when one is not feeling fit for anything else, but the supreme moments of life should be saved for enjoyment and loafing. I might not have been able to indulge in this particular loaf had it not been that the whole family was away—visiting, baseball, or something else,—and I was at home alone. Both the haying and the wheat harvest are over, and no farm work was pressing anyway. So I took a few sheets of paper, a magazine that I had no intention of reading, and a sofa pillow, and proceeded to a shady spot that is especially adapted to loafing.

Of course the first thing to do when enjoying a loaf is to catch up on arrears of sleep. Placing my ear firmly on the sofa pillow I prepared to snooze,

AROUND HOME

but I really had too much steam in me for immediate sleep. Instead I began to think and half-dream in a rambling, inconsequent way. Presently I found myself in a strenuous argument with myself as to whether it would be a proper and pleasant thing to disguise myself as a boy of fifteen, run away somewhere, and begin life over again. Before I had settled this momentous proposition my half-open eye caught sight of something just peeping above the level of the grass a few yards away. I closed my eye and tried to forget it. But it was no use. There was something familiar about the shape of that white glint. Then I remembered, and sat up with a jolt. An open-eyed glance convinced me that the white thing I saw was the top of a pitcher that had been missing for over a week. I had been much blamed for the disappearance of that pitcher, as I have been in the habit of taking it to the field with water. It is not much of a pitcher anyway, has a cracked top—a sort of hare-lip—but it is handy for a whole lot of things, and I had no business carrying it away and losing it. And there it was, safe and sound. The boys had used it to supply water to the grindstone when sharpening the mower knife. After that satisfactory discovery I replaced my ear on the sofa pillow and resumed my loaf. I would pick up the pitcher some other time when I was not busy. A song sparrow and a robin were singing lustily in the nearby elms. I began to wonder drowsily and dreamily just what their songs might mean. Would it not be glorious if we could understand

AROUND HOME

the exact message of bird songs—what the birds are saying—subject for a poem in that. . . . The next thing I remember is being awakened by a couple of house sparrows that were holding the hottest kind of an argument on a nearby branch. They were making a villainous chattering. I don't think I ever knew two birds that had so much to say to one another—and right there I lost all interest in bird language. I don't want to know what those sparrows had to say. No birds that had so much to say ever had anything worth while to say. This brought me up so wide awake that I realized that I had reached the end of my loaf. Of course I might plead as an excuse that while loafing I had somehow written these two paragraphs. But if you know anything about the country you will know that that merely aggravates my offense. Writing is a worse waste of time than loafing, even if you are able to find someone who is willing to pay for what you have written.

The Survival of Instinct

YESTERDAY I saw an interesting case of the survival of instinct in domesticated animals. No one would expect purebred Yorkshire pigs with generations and probably centuries of domesticity behind them to show even a shadowy reminiscence of the wild state. But I was driving along the road and slowed up to admire a litter of sucklings that

AROUND HOME

were nosing around in the long grass of an orchard. One of them must have noticed me, for there was a quick snort or grunt and every one of the youngsters dropped flat on its belly at the same instant and flattened itself on the ground so as to be almost invisible. They didn't wiggle a tail or stir a bristle until after I had passed them. The sound I had heard was evidently a primitive cry of warning that they all understood. Their obedience to it was automatic, for they all dropped as nearly as possible out of sight at the same instant. I have never read about wild pigs doing this, but I have seen a flock of quail or a covey of young partridge disappear in the same way, so I suppose it is natural to wild families of other kinds. It had all the appearance of a protective action that was hereditary, though one would not have expected to find it in pigs of high breeding.

While on the same drive I had a chance to make a further study of pigs—one that shows how pigs that have been reared in captivity have degenerated. A couple of boys who were driving an old sow along the road had come to a railroad, and the stubborn brute had come to a stop. Apparently she regarded the steel rails as a trap of some kind, and refused to be forced into it. When I came along she was giving a fine imitation of a wild boar at bay. With her tail toward the rails, she was standing with lowered head and an evil glint in her eyes. Any attempt to drive her would simply result in a squealing rush that no boy could stop,

AROUND HOME

and she would return at full speed along the way she had come. Having in mind occasions when I helped to lift pigs bodily over a railway track, I waited to see what would happen. But the boys evidently understood degenerate pig nature. One of them crossed the tracks and took a rosy apple from his pocket. Calling to the pig in his most alluring feeding-time accents, he placed the apple between the rails. The sow saw it from the tail of her eye, and turned at once. The boy backed away, and the sow stepped over the first rail and picked up the apple. The boy dropped another apple a few feet beyond the tracks and walked away. The pig finished the first apple, and, seeing the other one, walked across the other rail to get it. The trick was turned without any clubbing, fighting or trouble of any kind. An appeal to her reason would have done no good. She could not even be scared into crossing the tracks. But an appeal to her stomach worked like a charm. I expect pigs deserve all that is said about their greediness.

* * * *

Although everybody and everything in the country is hurried just now, there are six little pigs on the farm to whom life is one grand, sweet song. They are being fattened for the fall market, and to that end a self-feeder is provided. A balanced ration of mixed oat, barley and wheat chop is dumped into a huge hopper and a supply pours out into a trough that extends the full length of the hopper. As the pigs eat away the chop a new supply slides down to tempt them. They lie on their

AROUND HOME

stomachs in front of the self-feeder and munch luxuriously. Then they get up and get a drink of cool well water that is provided in a trough, and afterward wallow messily in a hole by the watering trough. If they are so inclined they can wander out to the orchard and pick some succulent grass, or maybe a wormy apple that has fallen from one of the trees. But always they find their way back to the self-feeder and make another attempt to eat the supply out of the ever-brimming trough. I don't think I have heard a pig squeal, or even grunt, since the self-feeder was put in operation. They are too happy to squeal and too full to grunt.

Burdock-Leaf Days

IF IT were not so all-fired hot I would try an experiment that might prove of vast benefit to humanity and incidentally be of great commercial value. The belief is current in the country, and has been ever since I can remember, and I am one of those who cherish the belief myself, that a burdock leaf in the crown of a straw hat protects one from the heat of the sun. But the belief lacks scientific demonstration. If it were not so hot I would hunt up a good healthy burdock leaf—not so very difficult a task—and wrap it around the thermometer. Then I would watch to see if the mercury would sink. But to do the thing right I would need two thermometers. One should be

AROUND HOME

left exposed to the rays of the sun and the other protected with a burdock leaf. Now that I look into the matter, I see that it would be rather hard to conduct the experiment with scientific precision. The thermometer that would be protected would really be in the shade, while the other would be exposed to the heat. I am afraid I would have to call in a scientist to do the job properly. Anyway, I have been convinced by experience that when the thermometer is registering ninety degrees in the shade or thereabouts, a burdock leaf in the crown of one's straw hat is a decided comfort. And I think it might be shown that the green leaf stops all dangerous rays that might otherwise cause sun-stroke. If the fact could be established, just think what a chance a poor farmer would have to make some easy money. Often I have seen men peddling palm-leaf fans on the beaches and on the streets in hot weather. What is to prevent one from gathering a supply of burdock leaves and peddling them in the same way? I'll bet a cookie that there are a lot of city men who used to put burdock leaves in their cow-breakfast hats when they were boys on the farm who would not hesitate to pay a nickel for a burdock leaf if someone came along the street peddling the broad leaves on these sweltering August days. And I think I know where plenty of burdock leaves could be found.

Yesterday I tackled two of the hottest jobs I have struck in a long time. As no one had been out to the thimbleberry patch for some days I

AROUND HOME

thought I would take a look to see how the berries were coming on. Taking along a breakfast food carton that was easily suspended from the thong of one of my braces, I went to the patch. I found the finest crop of berries we have had this year and simply couldn't let them go to waste. Even though the sun was blazing I stuck to the job until I had gone over the whole patch. Those who should know gave me credit for picking four quarts of the best berries brought in this season. But I didn't realize until I was done how hot the day was. I almost melted, and when I got to the house I was hotter than ever. And when I got cooled down I had to help at the milking because everybody wanted to hurry away to a Chautauqua meeting. I think the fly-bitten cows were hotter than I was and they radiated heat like a furnace. While milking I didn't feel any fear of a fuel shortage. Possibly if the scientists got at it they could show that farmers could get through a fuelless winter by utilizing the heat from their cows. Before I got through milking I could feel my brains beginning to bubble inside of my skull. No burdock leaf could ward off that heat. Later in the evening my sympathy went out to a robin that was trying to pick up worms and caterpillars from the lawn to feed a second clutch of youngsters in a nest in the oak trees. It would light on the lawn and stand for a while with its beak wide open. It was panting like a dog. Then it would remember its family duty and begin to pick up caterpillars. This forced it to keep its beak closed so that it would not drop

AROUND HOME

the food it was gathering. It must have almost suffocated. From all this nonsense you are expected to gather the fact that the hot wave has struck the country. But no one is grumbling much. It is just what we need for the corn.

Dog Discipline

I REGRET to say that stern measures will have to be used before the education of Bildad, the collie pup, will be complete. He is reasonably intelligent and unreasonably willing to work. He not only gets the cows, but brings them in a rush. They have learned that he can nip their heels in a way that hurts, and he has learned that by nipping often he can start them running toward the barn. To get him to do things it is only necessary to encourage him with praise, but it looks as if we would have to use a switch to discourage him from doing things that should not be done. He doesn't seem able to get it through his head just what is meant when we shout "Get out!" or "Stop it!" or "That will do!" or "Go home, sir!" He seems to regard all shouting as encouragement to keep right on doing what he is at. But he is intelligent, and a moderate amount of correction should make him understand that there are things that must not be done as well as things that should be done. At the present time his idea of having a really good time is to slip into the orchard where the pigs are pas-

AROUND HOME

turing and nip their flanks. He doesn't bark or make a sound of any kind when indulging in this sport. He lopes up behind a pig and nips it and by the time the pig has turned savagely to charge at him he is loping off to nip another. He never stops to argue with one that he has nipped. As there are thirteen almost grown selects and thick-smooths in the drove, he is able to have a lot of fun with them without waiting to get into a fight with any of them. As these pigs are of about the same age as the pup and grew up with him, they are not much afraid of him. They always show fight when he is asked to drive them. They are not afraid of him when they see him coming, and when he nips them unexpectedly they turn at him with champing jaws, only to find him loping off to surprise another pig. He seems to enjoy this sport very much, but the pigs never seem to get into the spirit of it. Then there are times when Bildad sees his duty in regard to pigs and does it without being given an order.

A few days ago we were loading a grist of chop-feed. The bags of oats were laid in the bottom of the hayrack and we went to fill a few bags of barley to add to the grist. Presently we became aware of the fact that Bildad was barking savagely, and for the first time we remembered that the old sow, the Speedhound, would have no trouble in dragging one of those bags of oats off the back of the wagon. We rushed out to see what was worrying the dog. He was standing by the wagon with all his bristles up, facing the Speedhound. She had

AROUND HOME

evidently tried to raid the oats and still wanted to do it, but Bildad kept her at a distance. He knew just what he should do and he did it. But say, since the wet weather began I have realized that he was a true observer who first coined the descriptive phrase "smells like a wet dog." Bildad is not a creature to be hugged and petted with any degree of pleasure after he has been running through the wet grass and weeds.

Cow Reasoning

THIS morning unusual and undesirable occupational exigencies made it necessary for me to be up and about before the sun had blown "his great auroral rose." In other words, I had to be up and about before daylight. I do not want to give the impression that I am one of those brisk early risers that you read about. I am not. But there was no getting out of it, and I had to be up and about. Just as the light became strong enough to dim the waning moon and make things visible I happened to glance through an open door that overlooked the pasture field. Oats and Bran, the yearlings, were walking briskly toward a gate that opened into a clover field, through which it would be possible to reach the corn. The cows were trailing behind. It was quite evident that a raid was meditated. The whole lot of them, including the horses, managed to break into the corn a couple of

AROUND HOME

nights ago and ever since they have been trying the fences as a tiger tries the bars of his cage. Every weak spot had to be reinforced with barbed wire, and besides we have kept an eye on them and yelled at them hoarsely whenever they seemed to be becoming too determined in their efforts. When Oats and Bran reached the gate they stopped. They made no attempt to try it, but they carried their heads with an air of expectancy that was not without justification. They were quite evidently waiting for Fenceviewer II. to take the initiative. When that "lineal descendant and heir-at-law" of the competent and impenitent Red Cow reached the gate, she started to work at once. Using her horns as a burglar would use a jimmy, she pried at the wires until I could hear them twanging. She worked back and forth along the gate, trying with all the ingenuity she could muster to make her way through it. I watched until I was satisfied that the fastenings were too strong for her and then resumed my work.

It struck me as rather unusual and rather wise on their part that they did no bawling. Such a noise might rouse light-sleeping humans, and they were on their guard. About half an hour later I looked up from my work and the cattle were nowhere to be seen. Fearing that they might be in mischief, I hurried out to look for them. I had to go around to another side of the corn field before finding them. Fenceviewer II. was still at work. They had passed into another field, and she was trying her field-breaking operations where the Government

AROUND HOME

drain passes under the fence. She was trying the wires with her horns, while the others were standing around watching. Fortunately, that usually weak spot in the fence had been sufficiently fortified, and she was foiled again. But no one need tell me that those cattle are without glimmerings of reason. Old Fenceviewer knew the likeliest places to attack the fences, and only the lack of the necessary tools kept her from breaking through. And the rest of the cows have evidently learned that she is the one to be depended on if they are to be successful in reaching the luscious corn. They are intelligent enough to follow her about in a hopeful spirit, and wait to profit by her skill and enterprise. I cannot say that I blame them much for trying to break out of the bare and burned pasture, but we find it more satisfactory to thin out the corn for them ourselves than to let them have the run of it. I am afraid that now we have started feeding them, we shall be forced to keep it up. In the opinion of experienced farmers, no matter how much rain we may get, it is unlikely that the pastures will be sufficiently revived this year to be of any value. Some even go so far as to say that even the roots of the grass are killed in some places. It is so burned that one could believe almost everything about it.

AROUND HOME

“Taste This!”

IF I were talking to you this morning instead of writing, my tones would be of the mincing, early Victorian, prunes and prisms variety. A few minutes ago I was asked to “Taste This,” and my mouth is now puckered up like the end of the button bag after the drawstring has been pulled. At the present time the wild-plum jam is being made. This year the wild plums are tart and acrid beyond all whooping. It is probably due to the long, dry spell, but, whatever the cause, they have an astringent juice that would even pucker the lip of a stone jug. I think it even puckered the spoon in which the stuff was handed to me, but I will not insist on this. The spoon may have been dented in some other way. Anyway, the plums are full of this kind of juice this year, and it must be got rid of before the work of preserving is proceeded with. The way to do it is to put on the plums with plenty of water and boil until they begin to break open. Then pour off the water and juice. Next put on the plums again with a smaller quantity of water, and boil until they are quite soft before adding the sugar—pound for pound. The result is a bland and pleasantly tart conserve that is beyond praise. But do not try to make jelly of that above-mentioned juice. It might be useful to kill weeds on the lawn, or you might add it to the pig ration, if the pigs are so warped by the dry

AROUND HOME

weather that you want to shrink them up so that they will hold swill. In any case, be sure that you get it all out of the plums before preserving them. I had a taste of the finished preserves, and once more proclaim that they surpass any fruit that I know of. They have a tang of the wild that excels anything found in tame fruits of any kind, no matter how skilfully they have been Burbanked.

* * * *

Speaking of the delights of wild-plum jam reminds me that I got a letter last spring that I intended to reply to at large, but something interfered, and now I cannot find the letter. A man of seventy-odd years wrote to tell me that he had no use for my raptures about asparagus, lamb's-quarter and weedy greens. He preferred leaving such things to the cows. He had confined his diet all his life to bread and potatoes and a little meat, with plenty of good cold water. I think he occasionally ate an apple. Anyway, he was proud of his lean larder and boasted that he was hale and hearty. Of course I congratulate him on his good health. He must have had the constitution of an ox to begin with, when he could live a life of hard work on a diet so lacking in variety. And just think how a man with such a constitution could have enjoyed life if he had allowed himself the wide and healthful variety recommended by our best authorities on dietetics. A man with a constitution like that might live to be an eupeptic centenarian if he gave his digestion a chance. He had no need to confine

AROUND HOME

himself to the strict regimen of an ascetic or hypochondriac. The whole broad table that nature has spread for the delight of her favourites might have been his for seventy years, and yet he confined himself to the monotonous and trying diet of an anchorite. Out upon such a man! What a trial he must have been for those who had to live with him. Nature offers an infinite variety of healthful savours to those who will take the trouble to use them properly, and yet he vaunted a narrow and joyless austerity. If I remember rightly, he even spoke contumeliously about mushrooms. Now I am willing to leave it to any authority on human health if more digestions are not ruined by a monotonous diet than from any other cause. Variety is not only the spice of life, but it promotes health and strength. The joy of good eating is just as natural to a properly balanced human being as delight in the sunshine and pure air. If I hadn't lost that man's letter I would probably say a few more things to him.

* * * *

Enemies

THERE is something about the place that is after the young chickens and turkeys. We are not sure whether it is an owl or a skunk or a woodchuck. Whatever it is, it has driven the

AROUND HOME

chickens to the shelter of the henhouse, and it gave the turkeys a midnight scare. This year we placed fifty incubator chickens under the care of four cluckers in a couple of coops in the new orchard. They were placed apart from the rest of the chickens so that they could be fed without being robbed by their elders. Also, by putting them so far from the house, they would not acquire the habit of coming to the door to beg. As they had the run of a bug-and-grasshopper-infested meadow, they grew thriftily and are even now taking the plump form of broilers. Although it is impossible to count the flock while they are running about in the grass, I do not think we have lost many, except the one that was killed by the hawk. It was reported to me, however, that they had been heard squawking in the night, as if something was attacking them. There was nothing that could be done about it, so nothing was done. Then the cluckers acted. They marshalled their flock home to the barn and took them to roost in the henhouse. As the chickens stick together, the four hens travel with them, all clucking at the same time and trying to lead in different directions. I would consider this absurd if I had not been watching the political situation for some time past. There are leaders clucking in every direction, but their flocks do not seem to separate. They run together in the most unexpected ways. Let us hope that the voters will be as fortunate as the chickens in getting safely into the right coop.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

Sometime after midnight, Saturday night, the turkey hen flew out of the orchard, making an unearthly racket. She blundered into apple trees with a wild flapping of wings and all the time was shrieking a warning "Phut! phut! phut!" at her little flock. When the mother hen utters a cry that sounds approximately like "Phut! phut!" the youngsters scatter in all directions like quail and hide wherever they can find cover. Something had evidently attacked the turkey hen where she was spending the night with the youngsters under her wings. They had reverted to the wild state at once and had sought safety after the manner of their wild ancestors. As the mother hen's line of flight took her by the tent she wakened us and we thought of organizing an expedition for the protection of our Christmas dinners, but soon saw that it would be useless. The night was dark and cloudy, with no moon. All we could do was to hope for the best and go to sleep again. I fully expected that some of the youngsters would be missing in the morning, but when we got up we found that she had already gathered her little flock and had all of them. The sudden scattering and the noise made by the mother had evidently disconcerted their enemy. Possibly the fact that we stirred in the tent and talked loudly also helped to frighten it off. Anyway the turkey knew by instinct what to do when danger threatened. One interesting fact about the incident was that on Saturday evening I had learned a new bit of turkey lore. I had noticed that when putting her little flock to sleep the turkey hen had chosen

AROUND HOME

an open spot in the orchard. Instead of trying to hide among the stacks or in one of the buildings, she had chosen an open space where she could see in every direction. I mentioned this to a visiting neighbour and he told me that turkey hens always do this. Until the young poults are able to fly up into a tree to roost they keep them in the open and usually sleep in a spot where they can stretch up their long necks and see in every direction. In this way they can see an approaching enemy. Besides, if they are obliged to scatter to save themselves there are no obstructions to bother them. Although I had been used to turkeys all my life I had not observed it and did not learn about it until a day before the instinctively wise turkey hen had to make use of her hereditary cunning.

III. Autumn



Mushrooms and Rain

THERE are many signs of rain, most of them unreliable, but still I shall venture to offer one that I think is entirely new. I think I have discovered a natural barometer that may prove valuable. Last year, when gathering mushrooms after a great rain, I was surprised to find a sprinkling of old mushrooms among the new ones that were pushing through the ground. This led me to suspect that mushrooms come up just before a rain, as well as after the ground has been soaked. Acting on this suspicion, I visited the pasture field whenever the sky looked threatening, and on several occasions got a good mess of mushrooms after a long dry spell. But I did not always find mushrooms when there were signs of rain, and this year's experience leads me to believe that this was because the signs of rain failed. This year I approached the matter in a different way. Happening to find mushrooms in the pasture when everything was parched, I suspected that rain was approaching, although none of the old familiar signs were in evidence, and the rain arrived in due time. The next time I found mushrooms in the dry pasture I ventured to predict rain, and it came within twenty-four hours. Day before yesterday after all signs of rain had been failing, as they always do in real dry weather, I happened to find a couple of mushrooms when crossing the pas-

AROUND HOME

ture, and the rain arrived promptly. A thunderstorm came yesterday afternoon, and we have had more or less rain ever since. Apparently the growth of mushrooms depends on weather conditions that accompany rain, and they make their appearance before a shower as well as after it. The two important points about this observation are that when it looks like rain it is worth while looking for mushrooms. If rain is really coming you will be likely to find some. On the other hand, if you find mushrooms in dry weather you may expect rain within a few hours. Of course, my method of gathering evidence in this matter is purely accidental, but I wish that some mushroom grower would watch his mushroom bed and see if he gets an extra supply before a downfall of rain. But perhaps mushrooms reared in captivity will not act like those that grow wild.

* * * *

Having ventured to give a new sign of rain, I feel keyed up enough to be greatly daring in another important matter. I think I have discovered a new and natural method of musical criticism which may prove of value. Yesterday a boy who was trying to establish himself as the farm cut-up, began singing a song in a falsetto voice. When his effort was at it loudest and worst I saw a black streak coming from the barn to the house. The large, lone cat that has been referred to at various times as Enoch Arden, the Prodigal Cat, etc., was approaching the scene of the racket with all his fur on end. He

AROUND HOME

came through the wire fence with a panther-like bound and halted on the lawn. His green eyes were ablaze and he was quite obviously out for a fight. He had evidently taken the falsetto singing for the noise of a cat fight, and, like the Irishman in the story, he wanted to ask: "Is this a private fight or can anywan get into it?" He wanted to get into it on any terms. When he realized how he had been fooled he looked disappointed and crestfallen and slunk under the lilac bushes. However, his actions gave me an idea. Having no particular taste for music—except the music of the bagpipes—I am often puzzled as to what to say when I have been listening to selections of classical music and such highbrow stuff. Now I know what to do. I shall take the Prodigal Cat with me whenever I am to hear great music. If he purrs contentedly I shall cull my best adjectives and pay compliments, but if he arches his back and shows fight I shall be chary of my praise. Who knows but with the help of a good tomcat I might make a hit as a musical critic.

October Picnics

EVERYBODY should have an October picnic—a day in the woods when the world is full of colour and the air is laden with the odours of much ripeness. But such a picnic is hard to arrange for. As a matter of fact, it should not be arranged for

AROUND HOME

at all. If you try to arrange to have your picnic on a certain day, when your friends and relatives can go with you, there are many chances to one that a cold wind will be blowing, that it will be raining, or that the day will be cloudy and misty. The proper way to enjoy an October picnic is to wait until a supreme morning comes when the sun rises clear and a little breeze is whispering from the south. If the signs are all set for a perfect day, let the spirit within you rise in rebellion against all forms of labour. Telephone to the office or factory that urgent family affairs require your attention for that day, and then assemble your family or intimate group of friends, raid the pantry and grocery stores for the makings of an outdoor meal and hie you to the country—to the woods—by whatever means is at your command. It is all right to have in mind such practical things as locating a winter supply of apples that may be bargained for or a winter supply of nuts which may be picked, but the more care-free you can make the day the better. There is nothing in nature more languorous than a perfect October day in Ontario, and such a day enjoyed to the full will give rest and refreshment that will endure in memory through the whole year. The colours will delight the eye, the crickets will delight the ear, the odours of ripe leaves on the damp ground will rise to the nostrils like incense, the sun and air will bathe you with healing, and when you eat your food in some sunny spot you will realize why you were blessed with a palate. You will go home at night carrying armfuls of bright

AROUND HOME

leaves and strange berries of marvellous hues. And you will feel that life is very good. But do not try to arrange for this picnic. If you do you will be almost sure to pick on the most disagreeable day of the season. Wait till the right day comes and then play hookey. That will greatly add to your pleasure.

* * * *

Those Cows

YESTERDAY I jotted down a few notes with the intention of writing a paragraph about "The Perfect Poke," but things have happened in the meantime, and I shall do a paragraph about "The Cussedness of Cows" instead. You may remember that when we turned out the cattle to pasture last spring it was found that fences meant nothing in the life of Houdini, the cow we had bought at a sale in the winter-time. She had kept things lively all winter by working out of her tie-chain, opening doors and gates, and so on, so it was not surprising that she had a short way of dealing with fences. But I had seen a poke through the car window one time when travelling to Toronto and I wanted to try it out. It is made from a forked branch and is suspended from the cow's neck like a large capital Y. The first one I made Houdini managed to get rid of almost at once. But I made another and added a rope to the

AROUND HOME

cow-chain—and it kept her confined to the pasture all summer. And, now that the summer is over, I thought I might honestly make a comment on this poke and recommend it to farmers who are troubled with outlaw cows. I made the notes in the morning, and at dinner-time it was reported that Houdini was not with the other cattle. We started a hunt and found her on the side-road some distance from home. In spite of the poke she had worked herself through, over or under the fence. She is capable of getting out by any means except flying. But what I want to know is, how did she know that I was going to write something in praise of that poke? It certainly looks as if she wanted to prove that it was not so much of a poke after all. But it held her all summer, until I was ready to write about it.

* * * *

The other cows have also made themselves objectionable, and have shown utter lack of intelligence during the past few days. It happens that we have an unusually good catch of red clover this season and its lush greenness must look very appetizing to the farm animals. Even though the ordinary pasture is very good for this time of the year they stand by the fence and look longingly at that clover. Finally it was decided to let them have a daily feed of the clover in the afternoon, when it would be free from dew and not likely to bloat them. When they were first let in they went at the clover with a rush, as if it was the best thing they had ever tasted and as if they couldn't get

AROUND HOME

enough of it. But when they had eaten all they could hold they began to explore the field and found that there was a patch of mangels in one corner of it. Since then the lush, succulent clover has meant nothing to them. As soon as they are let into the field they make straight for the mangels. Of course they eat the clover when they cannot get at the mangels, but we cannot take our eyes off them for a minute. Bildad has not yet reached the point where he will watch the cows and keep them within bounds, but he has shown his ability to drive them so completely that it is no longer necessary for him to be about to make the cows scamper out of mischief. As soon as we start to whistle for the dog they know what is going to happen and they scurry away. But though they are intelligent enough for that they do not seem able to get it through their heads that constantly trying to raid the mangel patch keeps them from getting as much clover as they otherwise would. When we have to watch them they get short turns in the field. But they will try for those mangels.

* * * *

Taste in Barns

WHILE driving through the country recently I noticed that quite a number of people were shifting their barns, stables and outbuildings generally. While wondering just why they were do-

[143]

AROUND HOME

ing this it suddenly dawned on me that in every case the changes were being made by new owners—either by sons who inherited the farms or by purchasers. This led me to make a little survey of the district and I found that almost in every case where farms changed hands the first thing done by the new owner was to change the buildings—either to move them to a new location or to put a cement foundation and stables under them. I wonder why that is? Isn't it possible for a man to put up buildings so that they will suit someone else? I suppose every man has ideas about how buildings should be arranged so as to have them handy and comfortable, and when he goes to settle down he changes things around to suit his taste. Perhaps barns are something like hats. A hatter once told me that no man can set a hat on another man's head so that it will sit to the wearer's satisfaction. The salesman may place the hat on a man's head at exactly the right angle to insure the maximum of good looks, but in every case the customer will put up his hand and shift it a little to make it comfortable. After getting this information I noticed that if anyone else slapped a hat on my head or even adjusted it carefully I simply had to shift it before it felt comfortable. A man apparently expresses his individuality by the way he wears his hat, and perhaps he does the same by the way he arranges his barns and stables. If you travel through the country you will find that barns and outbuildings vary as much as milkstands, and you know it is impossible to find two milkstands in a cheese-

AROUND HOME

making district that are at all alike. To one who is curious in such matters it is amazing to find in how many ways people can vary a little platform that is built to hold a can or two of milk. Although the modern tendency is all towards standardization there are some things that apparently cannot be standardized. Reverting for a moment to the subject on which I started, I also noticed that although the new owners changed their barns they very seldom changed the houses they had to live in. Does this mean that the average farmer is more interested in his outbuildings where he works than he is in the house where he lives? Or does it mean that the farmers' wives are more easily satisfied than their husbands? On the other hand it may mean that the men will make their own special buildings ship-shape while they cannot be induced to make changes and improvements to make things handier for their wives. A whole lot of questions are suggested, the answers to which might cast a great deal of light on various problems of country life.

* * * *

In Praise of Celery

ABOUT the pleasantest chore that falls to my lot these days is getting celery from the garden to serve as a side dish with broilers or roast ducklings. As it was not banked up until the first

AROUND HOME

of October and the weather has been warm there has been a wonderful new growth, and every stalk has a large white heart that is crisp and sweet as a hickory nut. The failure of the potatoes is almost made up for by the excellence of the celery, for I have been estimating that we can use it every day for the next four months before the supply is exhausted. As we never seem to tire of celery, it should furnish a valuable part of the vegetable food needed for a proper diet. I have found it so easy to raise celery that I am surprised that more people do not raise it in quantity for home use. The chief trouble we have found in the past is in keeping it for winter use, but this year we expect to get along better, as we have a cement roothouse to store it in. At present I am worrying about it a little, for we are in danger of sudden frosts that might spoil it. It does not do to put celery away for the winter too early, but I have made up my mind that as soon as another cold spell threatens I shall dig it and store it. By giving it proper care it can be kept through the winter, and no vegetable that is raised is more appetizing. Possibly if one had to buy it at city prices he would not be so lavish with it, but when a man raises it himself it is just as cheap as anything else. It may not be business-like to estimate it at the cost of production, but when you are farming for a living and not for profit that is the way to do it.

AROUND HOME

Autumn Odours

THIS is the season of autumn odours—odours of ripeness that float on the damp air and attract attention more than the perfumes of the seasons of blossoms and flowers. The rains seem to release these odours, or the damp air makes our nostrils more sensitive—anyway, there are odours to be enjoyed in every turn of a walk about a farm just now. Of course, it is impossible to describe them in words, but the odours of ripeness are more bland than those of the blossoming season. Just now the fallen leaves smell like the taste of fresh hickory nuts. And with this odour comes an association of ideas. As soon as it reaches me I stop with one foot in the air like a pointer dog expecting the whirr of a rising partridge. My eyes instinctively search the bare branches for the black glimpse of a squirrel, for the odour at once takes me back to the days when I roamed the woods with the old "Injun Chief" muzzle-loading shotgun. But the whirr of the partridge no longer goes with the odour of ripe leaves, and even the black squirrel is becoming a memory, though I see one occasionally. The quail are also gone, but they are associated with the damp, earthy odour of stubble-fields or the more pungent odour of meadows. Of course, the orchard has the odour of ripe apples—though they are scarce with us this year—and even the freshly-dug potatoes have an odour of their own

AROUND HOME

that is very distinctive. It is really in the spring, the season of growth, that one notices the odours of decay. A few cabbage leaves will make themselves noticeable in the garden, and dead leaves are not nearly so pleasant. Every season has its own peculiar odours, but those of autumn always make a special appeal. They seem to be associated with hunting and leisure and dreamy autumnal restfulness. Just now they are at their best, and are well worth a country walk. There is nothing like them in the streets.

* * * *

An Embarrassed Ram

SOCRATES may not be conquered, but he is at least embarrassed. Part of a broken mop-handle—a piece about three feet long—was found in a pile of rubbish. The brace and bit was brought home from the sugar-bush, and a hole was bored in the stick about two inches from the end. A cord was then put through the hole and tied around the ram's neck, so that the stick hung somewhat loosely between his legs. The fight was on at once. Socrates started to back up so as to deliver a bunt with the whole weight of his body behind it, and the stick poked him under the jaw. He realized at once that he couldn't do effective bunting with such an encumbrance, and started to wrestle with it.

AROUND HOME

He tried to hit the stick with his head, but couldn't manage it. Then he pawed at it with his front feet. At last he did what I never before saw a sheep do: he caught the stick in his teeth and tried to pull it off. We watched his struggles for a while, and then decided to see if he could really bunt. A boy walked in front of him, and he followed in his usual threatening manner. Then the boy passed through a door and closed it.

This seemed to be the final insult. Socrates started to back up for his bunt, and once more the stick poked him under the jaw. He jumped around for a little while, and finally came to a halt within a foot of the door. It evidently got through his head that he could no longer back up before bunting. After a thoughtful pause, he suddenly launched himself against the door. Three times he smashed against it without moving his head more than a few inches. He could still bunt, but he couldn't put the old-time force into the blow. Once he had settled this point, we attracted his attention again, and he tried to back up, but the attempt ended in another wrestle with the stick, and a repetition of the pawing and biting. Then a boy who had chores to do walked around the corner of the stable—without looking back. Socrates saw his chance and ran after him. I did not reach the corner in time to see what happened, but, judging from the amount of offended glances with which he favoured me, Socrates must have landed with a running bunt that had quite a bit of pep in it. But he was not able to repeat the assault, for, when he

AROUND HOME

tried to back up, he got another poke in the jaw. It is quite evident that he can still bunt, but within limits; but the frequent pokings under the jaw may discourage him and make him less of a nuisance. When last seen he was out in the orchard wrestling with the stick and trying to get rid of it.

A Burden of Bran

EVERY once in a while something happens that joggles my faith in civilization. This time I have been knocked off my centre by a box of bran. It looks like ordinary bran, such as we get at the feed store, and used to bring home with the grist from the mill in the uncivilized days when there was a grist mill by every stream that offered a sufficient head of power to turn the millstones. But this bran has come in a nice, snappy carton, with appropriate lettering. Let us look into this thing for a minute. We raise wheat on this farm. Because the local millers are gone, we sell the wheat and buy flour. The miller who makes this flour advertises that it is the whitest flour possible. He has taken all the bran out of it. Then, probably from another department of this milling establishment, there goes out a hoarse cry that white flour is dangerous to our health. It has no vitamins. We must buy bran to eat with it if we are to be normal citizens, and eminent doctors tell us, even by radio, that man needs his bran mashes just

AROUND HOME

as regularly as does a cow. So we buy bran to take the curse off our white flour. Now, if I were to take an old Indian stone pestle that is lying somewhere about the farm and pound up a grist of wheat in a hollow made in the top of a stump, I should make a flour that would contain all the health properties that we get when we buy high-priced bran to add to our high-priced white flour. But if I did that I would be reverting to barbarism. We must sell our wheat and let seventeen different men make profits on it before we buy back the flour and the bran that was taken out of it and mix them to make healthy bread. Civilization seems to depend on the complexity of the profits that are piled up on everything we use. And if the scientists prove that everything should be used in its natural state, like wheat, and we are simple enough to use it in that state without allowing the profits to accumulate, civilization will vanish. This makes it look as if civilization and profits for other people are the same thing.

Masterful Mungo

I AM beginning to feel a perverted pride in the goings-on of Mungo, the irrepressible—I might even say intransigent—yearling steer. He has bettered the record of Fenceviewer I., and deserves the name of Fencewrecker. Our fences are somewhat ancient of days, but they served to keep in

AROUND HOME

bounds the descendants of Fenceviewer I. until this husky and ambitious yearling started on his career of devastation. He has discovered that about eight hundred pounds of muscular beef cannot easily be kept under control, especially when directed by a greedy appetite and some glimmerings of intelligence. Any fence he can poke his head through he can push his body through. Moreover, he has been demonstrating that any fence he can put his head over he can push over. Yesterday he put so much energy into his work that he snapped off a fencepost and flattened the wire fence so that all the cows were able to follow him into the cornfield. It took all this forenoon to repair the damage he did. After the fence was fixed I decided that the time had come to fix a poke on the brute. Going to a little thicket of cherry trees that has grown up where a cherry tree once flourished, I selected a forked little tree that looked like a letter "Y," and trimmed it to make a poke like one I once saw from a car window. It had appealed to me because it showed how so simple a thing may be improved. The pokes of my early days were made like a letter "A," and the two legs hung down toward the ground. Those pokes were hard to keep in place. They would always get twisted and fail to function. But someone hit on the idea of using the letter "Y" as a model, and having the arms of the poke extend above the animal's head while the stem dragged between his legs. As this put the heavier part of the poke at the bottom it naturally would keep its proper position.

AROUND HOME

After shaping the poke I proceeded to fasten it to Mungo's neck.

The first discovery I made was that I had misjudged the size of his neck. It was fully twice as large as I thought. Still, the arms of the poke extended high enough to enable me to tie them together at the top with a piece of canvas that would not chafe his neck. When it was in place we turned him loose. The stem of the poke dragged between his legs and made him walk with his legs well apart—"like one that hath worn gyves." Thinking we had him conquered we went to dinner. Mungo was standing in the pasture field meditating and occasionally struggling with the poke. But it looked as if he would have to submit. After dinner we found Mungo without his poke, looking over the newly mended fence and meditating another raid. He had managed to rid himself of the poke by using the same strength and intelligence that had enabled him to wreck the fences. I am afraid that the only solution of the difficulty will be to put Mungo in a stall and fatten him for Christmas beef. The price he will fetch will help pay the bill for new fences.

A Lonesome Pup

THIS afternoon Bildad, the Collie pup, is distinctly lonesome. The thirteen pigs that he grew up with and whose comings and goings he looked after so carefully were shipped to Toronto

AROUND HOME

this forenoon—averaging a trifle over two hundred pounds each. As I have remarked before, these pigs and Bildad were almost of an age, and they simply refused to take any impudence or bossing from him as long as they could help it. When they were half-grown pigs and Bildad was a wobbly pup, uncertain on his legs, they used to chase him, and when he grew up and became able to assert himself they refused to take him seriously. Even when his snapping really hurt they were more inclined to fight than run. For some time past Bildad's favourite form of exercise was to slip up behind a fat and placid pig and give its plump ham a sharp nip. When the pig turned with gnashing teeth the dog would be some distance away, nipping another pig. He never waited to have it out with the pig he attacked. Without making a sound he would take a nip at every pig that was in sight, leave them all raging and keep right on scampering to safety and more mischief. He seemed to enjoy the game much more than the pigs did, and now they are gone he certainly seems to be lonesome. He lies on the lawn and rolls over and gets into fake quarrels with drifting leaves or makes a great roar when an automobile goes past on the concession-line or side-road. He doesn't seem to have anything on which to work off his superfluous steam. The new litter of little pigs do not interest him. He seems to think they are too small to bite. When they wander into forbidden territory he runs after them and stretches out his paws at them instead of using his teeth.

AROUND HOME

He seems to have some ideas of chivalry in his way of dealing with smaller animals. But I hold to it that he is really lonesome without the older pigs, even though he was inclined to treat them rough.

* * * *

Hallowe'en

THOSE who celebrate Hallowe'en were obliged to shift the date this year, and their pranks were all played on Saturday night. The weather was ideal for their lawless outing—cool, clear and with only starlight to shine on their depredations. Having had some experience in the past, I took in the tent so as to remove unnecessary temptation, but there was still a little work for idle hands to do. An empty box was placed on the ridge-pole of the granary, and the churn was labouriously heaved to the top of a little shed. What interests me chiefly about these little jokes is the physical character of primitive humour. A Hallowe'en joke usually involves an amount of hard labour that is surprising. I have known heavy gates to be carried half a mile and placed in the top branches of trees that could not be climbed without great difficulty, and to place a lumber waggon with the gravel box on it and the neck-yoke and whiffletrees in place across the ridge-pole of a big barn must be quite a contract. But that seems to be the idea of fun that obtains with young people when they feel

AROUND HOME

that immemorial custom entitles them to be "as funny as they can." The point of the joke usually lies in the wrath of the man whose belongings have been tampered with. As I like to have my own jokes appreciated I simulated a fine rage about the box on the granary and the churn on the shed—and I think that helped me to a solution of the mystery of who played the tricks. Certain young people seemed to find it hard to join in my wrath, and dodged around the corner of the house, where they could consult about the situation in peace. As they started to laugh before they were entirely out of sight I am inclined to think that their sympathy with me was not deep. In fact I think that a detective would look wise if the facts were laid before him and venture the opinion that it was an "inside job." And I think he would be right.

It seems to me that there is something of educational value at the bottom of these Hallowe'en pranks, if we would take the trouble to think it out carefully. Human nature seems to revolt against being circumspect at all times. We need a safety valve to enable us to blow off steam. Civilization tends to make our lives so purposeful that it is in danger of killing our instinct for play. The modern ideal is for efficiency, and all our efforts must tend to some valuable result. In consequence life becomes a kind of high-class slavery, against which the spirit of youth revolts. Like the good churchman who went on a spree and then explained to the scandalized session that he "wanted a day off," we all want to break our bonds occasionally. Even

AROUND HOME

the slave-owners of the past recognized this human peculiarity and found that their human chattels were more obedient and worked better after

“A week’s Saturnalia had loosened their chains.”

The older civilizations had their lawless holidays, when all kinds of pranks went unpunished, but we are so serious-minded that it requires some philosophizing to enable us to take even trifling Hallowe’en pranks in the proper spirit. And the result of our earnestness of purpose is not always what we expect. For instance, there is a passage in William de Morgan’s “When Ghost Meets Ghost,” in which he mourns that men are often “driven to evil courses to avoid the horrors of respectability.” We are inclined to overdo the good things we have worked out for the guidance of weak humanity, and Hallowe’en doings are a natural and logical reaction. Perhaps when we know a little more we shall be more tolerant of many human ebullitions that are now so gravely censured. Healthy humanity tends to break loose once in a while, and when the tendency is repressed life is robbed of much of its spontaneity and joyousness.

Autumn Beauty

THE days of beauty have come again. Already maples have been touched with colour, ranging from light yellow to crimson. But they have

AROUND HOME

been only touched. The great mass of foliage is still green and serves as an admirable setting for the vivid touches that announce the approach of autumn. The rains have revived the pasture-fields to their natural colour and the stalky wigwams of the cornfields show the lingering richness of harvest. The pumpkins give little dabs of orange, but the long drouth was cruel to them, and we miss their usual profusion and splendour among the corn shocks. The ivy on the houses reveals every shade of red known to Nature's palette. In the orchard the apples are unusually brilliant. The Kings, McIntosh Reds and Ben Davis are enough to make the mouths of passing automobilists water, but the more knowing will find a greater appeal in the light gold of the fall Pippins. There are asters, zinnias and gladioli in the garden that have made a wonderful recovery since the drouth passed. They rival the goldenrod in neglected corners of the fields, and the display of colour has just begun. If the weather continues favourable we should have an autumn to remember. In this description it would never do to forget the milky-white splotches of the mushrooms in the pasture-field, even though white is an absence of colour. If the theory that mushrooms come before rain is true we should have rain within a few hours, for to-day's gathering of mushrooms was unusually fresh and fine. And I must not forget the rich brown of the wheat-fields, where the drill is at work while I write. All the colours that Nature is lavishing for our delight show differently in the warm

AROUND HOME

sunlight at different hours of the day. The sun sets red and the moon rises golden before the last rays of the sun have disappeared. Altogether, everything is so beautiful that one feels like adding a human roar to the shrill music of the crickets.

* * * *

The Non-Extinguishable Lantern

NOW that the demand for a non-refillable bottle has ceased to exist I wish the inventors who have been fussing with that sort of thing would try to contrive a non-extinguishable lantern. I wouldn't have thought of it had it not been that a year ago a man sold me what he claimed was "a non-extinguishable lantern—a lantern that you can carry in a hurricane and it won't go out. The wind may blow it out of your hand, but the light will still keep burning steadily. If a whirlwind should blow it up into the sky it will still keep on burning like a star. It will give light just as well when lying on its side or when standing on its head as in any other position. This is the absolutely, peerless, nonpareil, nonsuch, ne plus ultra of lanterns, and all it costs is six shillings or one dollar and a half—with a yard of wick thrown in." Of course I fell for that lantern, for I have found lanterns a nuisance all the way from the old-fashioned kind

[159]

AROUND HOME

that were made of a tin frame with three panes of window glass, with a tallow candle inside, to the modern electric torches. They would all go out when needed the most. Before the man with the non-extinguishable lantern poured his sophistries into my willing ear I thought that all lanterns were false and fleeting and had submitted to their vagaries with an air of resignation. But after I got the perfect lantern I sat around in the evenings waiting for a real gale to blow, so that I could enjoy it properly. Of course it was as good as any other lantern for ordinary weather, and I did chores by its light both night and morning all last winter without having it tested in a real gale.

* * * *

Last week we had a great blow—a gale that shook the houses, uprooted trees, blew the tops off haystacks and took all kinds of liberties with the landscape. Happening to be out late I hunted up the non-extinguishable lantern when I got home and started to put away the driver. When I reached the driveshed the wind came around the corner with a whoop, the light fluttered wildly for a couple of seconds and then went out, leaving me in total darkness that was all the more total because I had had the light for a while. Groping my way I opened the driveshed door and the horse was good-natured enough to wait for me while I found a sheltered spot and re-lit the lantern. I was then able to unhitch without further trouble, but when we reached the stable door the wind came at us with another exultant whoop and once more I was

AROUND HOME

in darkness. To make matters worse the driver positively refused to enter the stable without a light. She was afraid to go home in the dark. After struggling for a while I attached the tie-line to her bridle and led her up to the stable door so that I was able to get inside and hold her at the same time. In the shelter of the stall I lighted the non-extinguishable wonder and the driver was graciously pleased to enter. After she had been unharnessed, fed and bedded I started back to the driveshed to put away the buggy. "Whoop! whoop!" said the wind, which by this time seemed to be enjoying the game of showing me where Moses was when the light went out. I tried to protect the lantern by hiding it under the flap of my raincoat, but it was no use. The wind crawled up the leg of my trousers and blew out the light again and then went whooping away into the next county. I did a little whooping just then myself that would have interested and perhaps shocked the good man who sold me the lantern. Then I stumbled around in the dark until I got the buggy under shelter. By groping carefully around the driveshed door I found the lantern again and started for the house, feeling for the path with my feet. And because of these experiences I am moved to advise inventors to try their hands at making a really non-refillable—I mean non-extinguishable—lantern. If they manage it I will buy one, for the man who sold me the wonder I have, put the idea in my head, and now I'll not be happy till I get one.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

This is the season for the annual round-up of chickens that have been roosting in the apple trees. I know! I know! They shouldn't be allowed to roost in the apple trees, but this is an ordinary farm and not a place where every hen has an individual antiseptic roost and a private nest in which to lay her high-priced eggs. After a good, motherly Barred Rock or Orpington has raised her family she seems to think that the healthiest place to raise a growing family is in a windswept tree, and far be it from me to interfere with her. On the night of the big wind and rain a lot of the youngsters were blown out of the trees and looked chilled and bedraggled in the morning, so it was decided that they should be put under cover in the hen-house. As the night was still as well as dark, the non-extinguishable lantern was lit hopefully, and with a stepladder and a couple of bran sacks we went after those chickens. In a little while we had the sacks filled with squawking young roosters and pullets, and with Bildad barking around us we had a glorious racket going on. When we reached the hen-house door with our noisy burdens I set down the lantern with an unexpected jolt and it played true to form. It went out at once. I am not sure, but I think the language I used would have sounded better if it had been set to music. I furnished enough of it to go up and down the scale several times without missing a note. After we had dumped the chickens on the floor we shut the door, lit the lantern again and went on picking chickens. As some of them

AROUND HOME

roosted high they were harder to pick than the apples, but we finally managed to finish the job without having the light go out again. According to our calculations only about six escaped us, but next morning we found about twenty running loose. To-night we must try to locate them again and finish the job, but I really wish we had a more dependable lantern.

An Important Decision

LET no one make the mistake of thinking that the Privy Council or the Supreme Court have all the knotty problems to deal with. Every day the father of a family is obliged to run a Court of Appeals and render judgment on all kinds of complex cases. If the humble decisions rendered in this way could only be known, I have no doubt that the wisdom of Solomon would be equalled or even surpassed by many plain citizens who are harried by the cost of living. Unfortunately I have no notable decisions of my own to report at the moment—as my favourite trick is to let judgment go by default. I have found that if I can arrange a stay of proceedings for a few hours the whole trouble is forgotten in the rush of new interests. But sometimes a case calling for decision is continuous and worries me for weeks before I get it settled. For instance, ever since the Red Astrakan apples came in after harvest I have been assured

AROUND HOME

with "petitionary vehemence" that that boy would make himself sick eating apples. He was never seen without an apple in an advanced stage of mastication. I'd see before the fall was over if I wouldn't have to send for the doctor for that boy. It was all up to me. Other people washed their hands of the whole matter—and the boy continued his apple-eating. I watched the performance with uneasiness, but could not convince myself of the need for action. I had some memories that indicated boy capacity in regard to apples. I remembered times when a schoolboy's blouse had the function of the cow's rumen, or first stomach. It was simply a receptacle to hold food for further processes of digestion. A boy would go to school with his blouse in what veterinarians would describe as a state of impaction, and gradually during the day the apples would be furtively transferred to the second or inner stomach. Memory of such things—legally this would class as a precedent—kept me from rendering judgment on the point under debate. Moreôver, I could not see that public policy demanded a smaller consumption of apples, especially when bushels and bushels of delicious varieties were going to waste. But yesterday a crisis developed. The boy was caught eating two apples at the same time. He had one in each hand and was feeding himself diligently. Right there I put down my foot, and other parents may find light and leading in my decision. I decided right on the spot that for a boy to eat two apples at once was coming it rather strong. As the law now stands

AROUND HOME

a boy may eat apples continuously as long as he confines himself to one apple at a time, but when he tries to eat two apples at once he may expect an outburst of paternal displeasure. Dixi! Fiat!

* * * *

An October Day

ALTHOUGH there is no question about the delight of spending a perfect October day afoot in the fields and woods, it must be admitted that other forms of travel have their merits. Travel in buggies would be delightful if the automobiles were not so plentiful, and travel in automobiles might be praised if they were not so speedy. My experience has been with the quiet glide of a varnished parlour car, and a day of travel in this way has filled my memory with a whole gallery of pictures. The amount of beauty spread on the landscape between Ottawa and Toronto would be bewildering if it were not so soothing and restful. Hill-sides covered with flaming red of sumach—marshes of dark green cedar—the yellow of birches and poplars and the scarlet of maples whirl past the wide windows in a never-ending panorama. The blue of the sky and the occasional blue of water give further variety to the palette of Nature, and occasional long, swinging flocks of blackbirds give a decorative touch that adds a further charm. Here and there an apple orchard shows the colour

AROUND HOME

of fruit and heaped barrels, and over all is the glorious October sunlight. No poet needs to think that he is being original and emphatic when he says that the world is still as beautiful as in the dawn of time. It is more beautiful, for we have had to learn how to enjoy beauty, just as we have had to learn how to develop and enjoy all the other good things of life. The world is more beautiful to-day than it was to those who viewed it from a "Cro-Magnon squatting place," for we have learned how to see and enjoy beauty. And a beautiful day in October is the best of all.

* * * *

*I think I have written enough about the beauty of autumn foliage, but this morning I saw one little touch so marvellous that it is worth special mention. I happened to be up and about just as the sun was rising. There were wisps and occasional banks of fog scattered over the fields and against the woods. When the sun rose with his full glory of light I happened to look toward the west. Between me and the multi-coloured foliage of the woodlot there was a dense bank of fog, which suddenly became luminous with the light of the sun and the colour of the autumn leaves. It was more beautiful than any sunset I have seen. The fog and the heavy dew both seemed to freshen and intensify the effects of the light and the foliage. The scene lasted only a few minutes, but it marked the supreme point of my enjoyment of the autumn.

*From Peter McArthur's last published article before the operation which preceded his death.

AROUND HOME

A Fall Chore

I KNOW that putting up stove-pipes is practically a forbidden subject in the editorial rooms of all self-respecting papers and magazines. Every would-be humourist seems to think that he can be funny about stove-pipes, if about nothing else. The subject has been done to death in verse, prose and pictures; but in spite of the attitude of weary editors, stove-pipes still have to be put up every fall, and the job furnishes entertainment to everyone except the poor wretch who is acting as chief engineer of the operations. I would not touch on so stale a subject were it not that I want to convey to the public an important piece of advice, quite serious advice without any joke or "catch" in it. When you are buying stove-pipes do not buy them in loose sections. Ask the hardware man to kindly put them together for you before you load them into the wagon. If he manages to put them together all right it is quite probable that you may be able to do the same. But if you buy pipes that are not put together there is always a danger of getting one or two in the batch that will wreck the peace of your home. I don't know how they make stove-pipes but I know that they vary in size, and a pipe that is the one hundredth part of an inch too big for the pipe into which it is to fit might just as well be a foot too big. Properly made stove-pipes are made with mathematical exactness so that they fit

AROUND HOME

one another easily and yet closely. The joints musn't be loose, and if they are a shade too tight they are impossible. It is so easy to have them a shade off that you will find it a very good rule to let the hardware dealer have the first struggle with them. When he finds trouble he'll not stop to wrestle with it, but will lay aside the offending pipe and give you a proper one. This will make things easier for you, but it will prepare a terrible disaster for the careless man who will come along later and get a whole collection of the misfit pipes in single lengths. He will take them home and wrestle with them, and try to put them together with table knives, and perhaps split some of them up the sides, and when he is just about at the point of explosion his wife will probably remark, "I don't see why you make so much fuss about putting up stove-pipes. You must be trying to put them together wrong end to. When my father used to put together pipes they used to slip together just as easy, and he never used such dreadful language."

About this point the dreadful language will be increased in flow, and the poor exasperated man may say unforgivable things about her father, simply because he doesn't know that the old gentleman was slick enough to make the hardware man fit the pipes together before he took them home. The man who does this can make the putting up of stove-pipes as quiet and soft spoken an affair as a Pink Tea. If this one little detail is attended to professional humourists will stop finding anything funny in our great annual task of pipe-fitting.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

Having succeeded in writing a serious and purposeful paragraph on the subject of putting up stove-pipes, I feel at liberty to make a few further remarks of a casual character.

There are a lot of people like myself who are too thrifty to buy new pipes every year. In the spring, when we take down the stoves they carry the pipes to the granary or driveshed and pile them carefully into the one corner of the building where there is a leak in the roof. When the fall comes we go cheerfully to get them, and after noting how rusty the pipes are we locate the hole in the roof and make up our minds to mend it—some time. Just what happens when we try to put together those rusty pipes I am not going to tell. You probably have a hot-tempered man in your own family, and you can find out all about it by watching him and listening to his lamentations. But I wish to address a word of serious advice to the innocent bystander who is always standing around when cranky pipes are being put together. When you notice that the man who is trying to get the pipes together is holding in his breath and is getting red in the face, it is no time to ask sweetly, "Don't you think the other end would go in easier?" Men have been known to jump up in the air and trample the pipes quite flat as the only fitting reply to such a question. If you can't make yourself silent and unobtrusively useful by holding the end of a pipe or by passing thin table knives at critical moments you had better go out for a walk, and the farther you go the more you will please the man

AROUND HOME

who is putting up the pipes. And if before starting for your walk you make a few remarks of the kind indicated, he will not care if you never come back. I find putting up stove-pipes a job that I want to do "in silence and alone." I have never yet found anyone who was able to give me any real assistance in fitting together the pipes, though they might be a great help when the fitted pipes were being placed between the stove and the chimney. I may as well say that I expect to put up stove-pipes this afternoon, and I am writing these paragraphs before starting at the job. Later in the day I may be too much "het up" to write anything that the editor would dare to print.

* * * *

P. S.—Two hours later. Quite calm, with a normal temperature and an even pulse I am sitting down to record the fact that the stove-pipes have been successfully fitted, put up and wired. I am inclined to think that the ease with which the work was done was largely due to the philosophical attitude acquired while writing on the subject in the forenoon. I am now able to add a little more wisdom that is based upon recent experience. Putting up stove-pipes is a matter of patient skill rather than brute strength. The strong man—that is the man who is too strong—is liable to make dents in the edges of the pipe that not even the most patient man can overcome. I have also noticed that while at this work one can get about five times as much good advice as he needs, and not over one-fifth of the competent help he requires. I have also dis-

AROUND HOME

covered that it is an excellent plan to smoke a pipe while at the job. As I always had both hands busy at the critical moments when the foolish remarks are always made, I couldn't open my mouth to "sass back" without breaking my pipe. Several times I came very near letting the pipe go in order to ease my feelings, but I remembered that only yesterday I paid for a new mouthpiece to replace one that had been broken in a previous fall. This checked me, and the pipes went up without a single unkind word being spoken.

Tinkering

JUST because something went wrong with the brake of a bicycle I put in a couple of happy hours at tinkering. I use the word tinkering deliberately after giving it full consideration. If I had the proper tools to do the work it would have been a mere mechanic's job, but tools had to be improvised. To hold one fractious bolt it was necessary to contrive a wrench from a wire potato masher and a pair of pinchers, and just because so much ingenuity was required I feel that tinkering is the right description of the work.

The tinkers who used to travel through the country years ago—in the golden age—never had the right tools to use, and had to devise substitutes. They had to be regular geniuses to do the odd jobs that were offered to them, and because they never

AROUND HOME

failed to rise to the occasion I have always had a much higher opinion of tinkers than prevails among the makers of dictionaries. Those learned Thesians describe tinkers as "the lowest order of craftsmen," and quote a certain derogatory statute of the age of Elizabeth, in which tinkers were classed with strolling poets, actors, vagabonds and similar undesirable citizens. And then these same pompous big-wigs discourse learnedly about the probable origin and true significance of "a tinker's dam." Without entering into a controversy, may I be permitted to say that that is exactly what I think their opinions are worth? Poets and actors have been rehabilitated since the time of Elizabeth, and occasionally they have received titles and have been received in good society.

Perhaps if we investigated we would find that tinkers have also risen in the social scale and are living prosperously under some other name. The resourcefulness needed to make a good tinker could not help having an important bearing on the work of the world. I suspect that all our great inventors are really reincarnated tinkers, for whenever I try to invent anything I am sure to be asked: "What on earth are you tinkering at now?" Having hit on this thought, it is hardly necessary for me to mention the tinker Bunyan when defending the ancient craft, or to quote Burns' roistering song,

"My bonnie lass, I work in brass,
A tinkler is my station."

Tinkers are all right in spite of ancient law-makers and modern makers of dictionaries. So I

AROUND HOME

say boldly that I put in a couple of hours at tinkering, and am not ashamed of it.

* * * *

I doubt if there is any other human occupation that is taken more seriously by children than tinkering. Whenever you start to tinker at anything they crowd around you and watch with unflagging interest and seriousness. Besides, are they not in constant need of having their toys tinkered? To them the tinker is the master workman, and when I was tinkering with that bicycle brake three heads were crowded so close to mine that I could hardly move without bumping them. When the watchers spoke it was in restrained voices, and they were in such deadly earnest that I do not think they smiled once. They were wonderfully ready to hold things for me or to fetch things that I needed, and they were in entire sympathy with the work in hand. As for myself, I had to concentrate my mind wholly on the job, to the exclusion of farming, writing, politics and even the war. The principal of that brake had to be studied out, and a method of fixing it had to be devised without any of the appliances that a mechanic would use. The work took my mind off its everyday interests much more completely than anything I ever tried. It was better than reading a book or going to a play. It was a complete distraction, and when the job was finally completed satisfactorily I felt mentally rested and refreshed.

As a relaxation I have no hesitation in recommending tinkering. If you are feeling fagged out

AROUND HOME

by the problems of high finance you have to wrestle with on account of the high cost of living, just undertake a job of tinkering and see how it will rest you. Fix up the egg-beater that has lost its cunning or take apart the old clock and clean it, and when your job is done you will feel like a new man. And if you make a good job of it you will feel so proud of yourself that you can't talk about anything else for the rest of the day, just as I can't talk about anything else but tinkering since I fixed that bicycle brake as well as if it had been taken to a garage to be attended to by a mechanician. Don't despise tinkering just because the dictionary-makers do not speak well of it.

* * * *

In the days when tinkering was a profession, though a humble one, the tinkers had a list of customers of whose homes they made a round every few months. Against their coming all kinds of broken and disabled things were set aside. Pots and pans that needed soldering, apple-paring machines that needed repairing, and what not? The tinkers would mend broken stove lids by riveting pieces of strap iron on them, draw together cracks in the top of the stove with wire, and even improvise new hinges for those that had broken off the doors of the stove. The pioneers did not need to have sermons on thrift preached to them. They had to be thrifty or go without. Nothing was thrown away that could possibly be turned to use or mended by the tinker. But matters have changed since then. When a pot or pan or even a

AROUND HOME

stove becomes defective it is thrown into the scrap heap to await the coming of the junk man. Even farm implements are often thrown to this fate much sooner than would be the case if the old passion for thrift survived.

The tinker and the junk man give a fairly accurate comparison of the past and the present. The tinker of other days went around the country patching things up to make them last as long as possible, so that people could get the last bit of service from their belongings. Now the junk man goes around picking up for nothing or for a few cents many things that a little attention would have made useful. I have been told that men have become rich from the junk business—from the wastage of Canadian homes.

Indeed I have a clear recollection of meeting a bright young foreigner in a smoking-car some years ago and in the course of the conversation that was started to break the tedium of the trip, he told me that he had organized the junk business. He had representatives in all parts of Ontario who gathered old rags, rubbers, irons and all sorts of things that could be turned to account. After these things were sorted he shipped them in car-load lots to various markets. Some things were repaired and sent to second-hand shops where there was a market for them, and everything his men collected was turned to some use. He had practically built up a junk-man's trust and the profits of the business were such that there is no reason to doubt that he will yet win a fortune and a title just like other trust builders.

[175]

AROUND HOME

And the money he was making and which was enabling him to employ many helpers, all provided with horses and wagons—mostly salvaged from the boneyard's junk heaps—was derived from the waste of Canadians. It strikes me that with the need of thrift becoming more apparent, it behooves us to encourage the tinker rather than the junkman. It is possible that in the distant future the tinker may once more come into his own.

Mungo

THE persistence of Mungo, the yearling steer, is beginning to arouse a grudging admiration as well as wrath. By reinforcing the fences of the pasture field with barbed wire we thought we had him conquered. For two days he stayed within bounds, but this morning we found him in the alfalfa field. He found a spot where, by throwing his whole weight against the wire fence, he was able to bend it down and push through between it and the barbed wire stretched along the top. None of the other cattle was able to follow him. Even his competent mother, Fenceviewer II., could only look over the fence and bawl. Mungo seems to be a well-defined case of atavism. He has all the resourcefulness of his grandmother, the Red Cow. To this he has added a robust masculinity that makes him the incarnation of the insolence of youth. He is of athletic build, and has a long, free

AROUND HOME

stride that betokens self-confidence. When walking he carries his head high, and the glance of his eye shows that fences do not mean much in his young life. At times I have caught just such a glance over the dashboard of a passing automobile that was driven by a young road-hog who was also a speed-hound. Mungo seems to have caught the spirit of our time, and means to have his own way about everything. But when the rush of apple picking and packing is over I shall go to the woods and get a forked branch that will make a new-fangled poke that I would like to try out. Up to the present I have kept my hands off the brute, but several times I have walked around him and meditated on what I would like to do to him with a blacksnake whip. I expect that we shall have quite a session with him when the time comes to put the cattle in their stalls for the winter. His neck has never been galled by a chain, but when the time comes for him to take his place in a stall he will go into it, and his education will begin. At the present time he is a standing insult to constituted authority on the farm, and that is not to be endured too long.

The Speed Hound

IT IS just as great a mistake to name animals when they are small and attractive as it is to give a name such as Patience, Charity, or Samson, to children and expect them to grow up to it.

AROUND HOME

Patience may grow up to be a termagant, Charity to be a skinflint, and Samson to be a weakling. I often think that people should have a chance to take new names when they grow up—names more appropriate to their development. Of course, this need is supplied by nicknames that are sometimes keenly descriptive, but that does not exactly meet the situation. It lacks dignity. But it was not on the general question of names that I started to write. When we added a sow to our family live stock this spring the children named her Peggy. As she was still young enough to have some of the endearing characteristics of youth, the name seemed to fit her. But you should see her now. And also you should listen to her. All the graces are gone. Since those early days she has raised a family, and now that the little pigs have been weaned she is simply a free-ranging old sow of singular offensiveness. The boys who named her affectionately in the spring have renamed her. They now call her "the Speed Hound." And the name seems to fit. She doesn't carry an ounce of superfluous flesh and her foot-work is a marvel of reach and speed. She can come nearer than anything I ever saw to being in two places at the same time. For instance, if one boy is feeding the calves at the orchard gate and another opens the stable door to get some chicken feed from the bin she can be a nuisance to both at the same time. And if an apple falls in the orchard while she is vibrating back and forth between the calves and the grain bin, she can make a detour to get it and not be

AROUND HOME

missed from either place. And all the time she is squalling at the top of her lungs and libelling us to the whole neighbourhood. To hear her you would think that we are starving her to death, while the whole trouble is due to a difference of ambitions. We are ambitious to have her live with us for another year as part of our bacon-producing outfit, while her ambition is to pile about three hundred pounds of extra fat on her carcass in the course of the next few months. Owing to this difference of opinion she is limited to a daily ration that will keep her in sound health and good condition. As she has been eating for herself and her family for some weeks her appetite is at its highest development and she refuses to be satisfied. And there is nothing in this ravenous brute that reminds one of the cunning little ways of Peggy. Why, I remember recording the fact that Peggy was so shy when she first came that she would not eat if anyone was looking at her. Now she doesn't care who sees her. She not only eats her chop feed and swill in the open without any thought of table manners, but would even eat the pail in which her ration is carried if it were not taken away. Instead of being a cunning little pig she is now a perambulating pest with a long, straight tail that is utterly devoid of the customary affable curl.

AROUND HOME

Handicapped Feeders

SINCE the corn-husking began the hens, turkeys and ducks have had corn on the ear added to their rations. I know that is not the right way to feed it, but when the corn is first husked it is not quite in the proper condition to be put through the corn-sheller, and besides when we are busy it seems easier to take a few ears from the crib, break them and throw them among the fowl. The hens and turkeys seem to get along all right with this method of feeding, for they have strong beaks with which they can strike sharp strokes that will loosen the grains, but the ducks are seriously handicapped. Their spoon bills are made for poking around in slush and rubbish, and when they try to get corn off the ear it entails an amount of effort that is discouraging. They poke at it and at the same time nibble rapidly, but they fail to get the force of leverage necessary to loosen the grains. While watching them at work I was struck by the fact that all our domestic fowl are not properly equipped for any kind of feeding that is at all difficult. If the ducks could only take hold of an ear of corn with one foot and hold it firmly while working at it with their bills they would be much more successful. As at present equipped they merely make the ear roll along ahead of them while they poke at it with eager futility. And it would be a great help to the

AROUND HOME

turkeys and hens if they could also hold the ear with their feet. The driving strokes of their beaks make the ears jump about, and it often happens that after getting a grain it is found that the ear jumped out of reach and was attacked by another bird. I am not sure that our scientists can do anything about it, but they can at least think it over. A duck that could hold its food in place as a hawk does would have a much better chance of making its way in a crowded barnyard. Some wild birds are gifted in this way, so why not our domestic fowl? It is possible that we have been overlooking some opportunities.

Why I Stick to the Farm

WHY do I stick to the farm?" You might as well ask a woodchuck why he sticks to his hole.

This comparison has more foundation in fact than you perhaps imagine, for whenever I come home from a little visit to the outerworld I always turn into the lane with a joyous chuckle that is much like the chuckle that a woodchuck chuckles when he dives into his tunnel. The farm is a place of peace, a place of refuge and a home. This is a point on which the woodchuck and I are entirely agreed.

The farm means all these things to me because I was born on it and have learned to realize some-

AROUND HOME

thing of its possibilities. All my memories of childhood and boyhood are bound up with it. To be born on a farm is the greatest good that can befall a human being. To live on a farm and enjoy all that it has to offer is the greatest good that can be attained by a poet or a philosopher.

To make it clear why I harbour these convictions it is necessary to sweep away some mistaken notions about farming. To do this perhaps I can not do better than explain just how this particular farm came to be hewn from the wilderness. The work of clearing the land and bringing it under cultivation was done by men and women who had only one purpose in life—to establish a home where they and their children might be free. They made their home self-sustaining—winning their food, clothing and shelter from the land and its products, by the labour of their own hands. The home was their ideal. All the farm work was undertaken to provide for its needs and when the home was supplied they rested. Their ambition was satisfied.

Brought up in this home I missed learning too young the lessons that destroy so many homes. To begin with I had only the vaguest ideas of personal ownership. The home belonged to all of us and our work went to keep it up and pay expenses. It is true that contact with the world finally educated the children to ideas of personal property and roused our ambitions. Driven by these generally accepted ideas we went our way, but somehow the farm that had been started right stayed in the backs of our minds as home. Although I have lived in

AROUND HOME

far countries and great cities no place ever was my home except this farm. And in due time I came back to try to carry on the home tradition that had been established by a pioneer father and mother.

I stick to the farm because it is the most satisfactory thing in the world to stick to. It is solid, right down to the centre of the earth. It stays right where it is through depressions, panics, wars and every other kind of human foolishness. Even an earthquake could only joggle it, and this is not an earthquake region.

Moreover, you can't speed up the farm. It is timed to the sun and the seasons. Airships may pass over it at the rate of one hundred and fifty miles an hour, but the thistledowns that rise from my fields go at the rate of the prevailing wind, just as they did when they rose from the Garden of Eden. You can't hurry the farm and you can't hurry me. The grass grows and the leaves come out when Spring comes dawdling back from the south and not one minute before.

I stick to the farm because it is the only thing I have ever found that is entirely dependable. The seedtime and the harvest come to it every year with easygoing and unworried certainty. They never come twice at exactly the same time nor bring the same bounties, but they never fail to come. They may fail to bring wheat, but if they do they will bring abundant corn:

“Cold and dry for wheat and rye,
Wet and warm for Indian corn.”

AROUND HOME

The farm means "safety first" with the safety guaranteed by all-embracing Nature—and the labour of your own hands. It is well not to forget the labour of your own hands.

To get the fullest enjoyment out of the farm you must do things for it with your own hands. A farm is like a friend. The more you do for a friend the better you like him and the more you do for a farm the dearer it becomes to you.

Although I am friends with all the trees on the farm, the ones I like best are those that I planted myself. The shade trees that I planted myself seem to throw a more generous shade than any other and no apple tastes as good as one from a tree that I planted, fertilized, pruned, sprayed and looked after myself. I have planted thousands of trees in the woodlot and no artist ever got such a thrill from looking at his finished masterpiece as I get whenever I visit my plantation and see how much the trees have grown since my last visit. To get the most out of a farm you must put yourself into it—do things for it that will be permanent—do them with your own hands.

Of course, farming means hard work. That side of it has been harped on until even a lot of farmers think it means nothing else. That tale has been told since the beginning until it has become exactly what Tennyson has called it:

"A tale of little meaning
Although its words are strong."

But even the hardest working farmer can afford

AROUND HOME

to devote an occasional few minutes to enjoyment—especially at meal-times. Let us give some consideration to this more frivolous side of farming. Let us begin with the spring. When the warm winds and the rains begin to sweep away the snow and to unbind the shackles of frost, just draw a deep breath and realize that you are more alive than anything else on earth. The farmer's work is with the very elements of life and he should enjoy life to the full. Even the cattle begin to bawl and show an interest in life as soon as the grass shows green beyond the barnyard fence. You do not even have to stop your work to hear the first notes of the song sparrow or the honking of the wild geese passing overhead. The sun is busier than you are, bringing warmth and growth to every seed, bud and root—to wildflowers and weeds as well as to your precious wheat—and see how serene he is about it all. He can even take time to jocularly burn a blister on the back of your neck on his busiest day.

The tulips and the daffodils in the garden need only a glance to give you their message of beauty, and if you happen to be hurrying through the woodlot you can surely pause long enough to see the anemones and spring beauties at your feet.

On this particular farm the opening rite of spring is tapping the sugar-bush. But I will not dwell on the joys of making sugar, for all farms are not blessed with sugar maples.

But my delight in maple syrup is hardly over before I begin paying furtive visits to the asparagus bed. I planted that asparagus myself, and I like to

AROUND HOME

be on hand the first morning that a thick, fat shoot pushes up through the ground. After the asparagus come strawberries, raspberries, new potatoes—a list that becomes more crowded as the seasons pass until we have picked the last apples and pitted the potatoes in the fall. Spring, summer and autumn are all linked together with beauties and luxuries and delights.

And even the winter has its charms. As the animals are more dependent on us they become more friendly. Horses, cows, sheep, pigs, hens all greet us in their own characteristic way when we visit them in the morning. And what is more exhilarating than the days spent in the woodlot, with the snow crunching underfoot and the axe rousing the frosty echoes? The farmer prepares his year's supply of fuel without thought of strikes or soaring prices.

Of course if you estimate everything in terms of dollars you can never understand why I stick to the farm. Dollars enter very little into the question. If you wish you may quote me a price for the basket of new potatoes I bring in from the garden, but what price can you put on the satisfaction I get from digging potatoes of my own planting and tending? Can you put a price on the joy of turning up a hill of big ones that might have taken the prize at the fall fair and knowing that all this is due to my practical partnership with Nature in producing them? The potatoes themselves may satisfy bodily hunger, but the joy of producing them satisfies the soul's hunger for creation, and it is priceless.

AROUND HOME

While meditating on this aspect of farm life I went for a ramble in the pasture-field to hunt for mushrooms. For half an hour—while picking up beauties—I canvassed my memory to see if I could remember the price I had got for anything I had ever sold off the farm. Although I have lived on this farm most of my life and have sold all kinds of farm stock and produce I could not remember the exact price I got for one item. But I remembered how beautiful the apples were the first year we pruned and sprayed the old orchard. I could remember how fine the oats looked the year we had them in the field back of the root-house. I remembered litters of little pigs that were as plump as sausages and as cunning as kittens. I remembered calves that I had fed to admired sleekness and hogs that I had stuffed to fatness, but the prices they fetched I could not remember.

And that was not because I did not need the money—I have always needed the money and sometimes needed it bitterly—but the cash crop was not the crop that satisfied. As I let my memory wander over the past, hunting for prices that had failed to make a record, I remembered climbing the pear tree to get a big pear that had lodged in a fork and had ripened lusciously in the sun. I remembered tramping through a wet pasture gathering mushrooms and how a little moist hand stole into mine because a little maiden was afraid of a cow we were passing. I remembered coasting with a home-made sled on a little bank beside the creek, and also remembered seeing my children

AROUND HOME

coasting on that same bank on sleds of their own making. I could see in the perspective of memory great piles of apples under the trees, shining fields of corn, colts scampering in the pastures, lambs playing king of the castle on anthills—a crowding, joyous film of homely pictures that brought happy tears to my eyes—and there was not a dollar mark on one of them. The dollars are necessary, of course—very necessary,—but you can earn dollars digging in a sewer, or get them by sharp practices in business. But where else but on the farm can you get the needful dollars and forget them in the joy of your surroundings?

These are a few of the reasons why I stick to the farm, and I feel sure that the woodchuck would endorse every word I have written.

IV. Winter



The Wood-Pile

NOW that all kinds of farm work are at a standstill except the chores, the wood-pile takes the centre of the stage. But that is hardly exact. It is the need of a wood-pile that becomes important. Do my best, I can't get a permanent wood-pile. I have been trying for five years to get a wood-pile that could be pointed to with pride, but thus far without success. At one time I got up the energy to get enough timber together to give a day's work to a buzz-saw and a gang of men, and for almost a year there was a respectable wood-pile in a wood-lot three-quarters of a mile away. But we never had anything but dribs and drabs of wood at the house. Whenever we ran short I would haul home a jag, but, though I made many plans, I never found time to fetch home the whole lot and make a respectable pile. And in time that source of supply gave out, and I was back to the job of hauling home poles and chopping them—or hiring someone else to chop them. I can get hay stacked ahead, and corn-stalks and grain in the granary, but the wood seems to beat me. The ravenous, insatiable, all-consuming kitchen stove eats up my wood as fast as I can provide it. It never seems to be satisfied. It is as tireless as the interest on a mortgage. It uses wood at all seasons and at all hours of the day and night. I have made several brave attempts to

[191]

AROUND HOME

get a pile of wood ahead, but the result could always be described by parodying Omar :

The pile of wood you set your heart upon
Turns ashes ere it seasons—and anon,
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face,
Lighting a little hour or two, is gone.

As might be expected, Shakespeare did not overlook the dramatic possibilities of a wood-pile. Catch him missing anything so humanly important as that! You will remember that in "The Tempest" the harsh parent of the bride set the shipwrecked lover at work on the wood-pile—presumably to pay for his meals while he was about the cave. Andrew Lang, in one of his essays, comments on the cold island on which this great play was located, and based his argument on the amount of wood that had to be carried by the afflicted characters. But I do not think his argument is sound. There are passages in the play in which the balminess of the island is extolled. In my opinion Shakespeare introduced the wood-pile incidents because he knew their exasperating nature. Mrs. Shakespeare had no doubt called his attention to the emptiness of the wood-box and the need of fetching an armful until his great soul had rebelled. Anyway, he knew all about wood-piles and the anguish of spirit they can cause. With what feeling have I quoted the words of the unhappy Ferdinand:

"I must remove
Some thousands of these logs, and pile them up,
Upon a sore injunction."

AROUND HOME

There is more that might be appropriate, but it is so mixed up with sentimental gush that I do not care to quote more than I have. But Ferdinand's case had compensations that mine lacks. Miranda never comes around to me and says with a languishing accent:

"Alas, now, pray you,
Work not so hard; I would the lightning had
Burnt up those logs that you are enjoined to pile."

That was all very charming for Ferdinand, but when I am at the wood-pile wrestling with a knot that makes me wonder whether I should use an old-fashioned maul and wedge, blasting powder or bad language to tear it apart, I am much more likely to hear a voice inquiring:

"Aren't you ever coming with that armful of wood?"

* * * *

Like another character in Shakespeare, "I am inland bred, and love a great fire." One of the delights that lured me back to the land was the prospect of having old-fashioned wood fires. I was raised before an open fireplace, and most of my childhood dreams were dreamed while gazing at the dancing flames on the dying coals. But when I got back to the country the fireplaces were gone, and the wood mostly gone, and the big, strong men who used to chop wood for a dollar a day were all gone. Instead of the romantic open fireplace I found the prosaic kitchen stove, which has all the appetite of the fireplace without its charm. And I had to hunt up wood myself and haul it

AROUND HOME

myself and chop it myself. I am afraid that the open fireplace of my youthful reveries can never be revived. Moreover, there is a movement on foot for the conservation of what remains of our forests. Those wood fires of pioneer days were really part of the scheme of clearing the land, and the more wood they consumed the better pleased people were. But now we have a different point of view. Instead of clearing land we are beginning the work of reforestation. Now that I have had considerable experience with a wood-pile, I am for conservation. I feel that it is a sin and a shame to destroy the noble forest trees for such base utilitarian purposes as feeding a thankless kitchen stove. I think I shall use coal in future. Coal may be mussy, but you don't have to split it, and it goes farther.

But in spite of all this grumbling we are more likely to have a real wood-pile this year than at any time in the past five years. The big winds of a year ago and of last spring blew down some of the biggest maples in the wood-lot. As an examination showed these trees were too shaky and dozy to be worth making into lumber I decided to cut them into stovewood. While fired by this great purpose I bought a new axe handle, a departmental store crosscut saw, a saw set, file, whetstone and everything necessary to keep the tools in good shape. For one disillusioning day I worked on the end of that crosscut saw. Then I went back to poles and tops and the buck saw. This fall, however, I managed to let the job of cutting those big trees into

AROUND HOME

eighteen-inch wood. Already the piles are growing beautifully, and there should be at least thirty cords of it. I have highly resolved that when the first sleighing comes I shall "snake" it up to the house, and then we shall have the wood-pile of our dreams. Of course, it will still have to be split fine, but not too fine. I have noticed that small wood gives the kitchen stove an undue advantage, and it gulps down the sticks whole without stopping to chew on them. But oh, but oh, I am hoping for a day when the children grow up, when I can proclaim my freedom and, like Caliban, refuse to

"Fetch in firing
At requiring."

An Animated Barometer

I FIND that we have an animated barometer on the place that is probably just as reliable as the most up-to-date scientific instrument that we could buy. It is also due to a natural instinct that must have been acquired during the long process of evolution. If we want to get a line on the weather for the following morning all we have to do is to observe the doings of our lordly turkey gobbler and his devoted spouse. In mild, settled weather they prefer to roost on the wind-swept ridge-board of the stable, and evidently the exposure does them no harm. They must thrive on it, for the Christmas turkey

AROUND HOME

we saved when the others were sold habitually slept on the roof, but when she came to the table she proved to be the tenderest and "fattest ever." They seem to choose a windswept roost by preference, and with their heads tucked under their wings, they come through all right when a hen or rooster would have a frozen comb. But when a cold snap is coming, or a severe storm, the turkeys go to the henhouse and roost with the hens. Some instinct makes them seek shelter when there is nothing that an ordinary human being can notice that indicates a change. And the gobbler goes to roost in a way that never fails to attract attention. He waits until all the hens are settled for the night and then proceeds to prepare for the night in a way that is worthy of the ex-Kaiser—of whom he reminds us by his autocratic habits. The roosts in the henhouse are arranged like a wide ladder, sloping from the floor to the roof. When the gobbler makes up his mind that it is time to retire he hops up on the lowest roosts at the end nearest the door. Instead of settling down on his wishbone and apologizing to the hens for intruding on their quarters, he promptly starts to shuffle along the roost, pecking at the hens with his strong beak until he drives them squawking to the floor. As soon as he reaches the far end of the roost he steps up to the next one and works his way to the other end, knocking off the hens in the same way. In this way he works up to the top roost and does not stop until he has driven off every hen. Having made all the hens thoroughly uncomfortable, he settles down

AROUND HOME

for the night and allows them to clamber back, though they all keep at a respectful distance from him. When we hear the racket going on in the henhouse we know that we are due to have an uncomfortable change in the weather before morning, no matter how fair it may look. It is a signal that all doors and windows about the buildings must be closed. So, although the gobbler is something of a nuisance on account of the way he treats the hens, he has a distinct value as a barometer.

The Christmas Tree

WHERE are the people who scoffed at me a few years ago for planting forest trees? They said to my face, and they wrote letters telling me: "You will never live to get the good of them."

While I resented their sordid attitude, I could not defend myself very successfully against their criticisms. But to-day I am standing on tiptoe and asking them to come one, come all, I answer them all and answer them forever. The first tree has been cut from the trees of our planting, and I am fully rewarded for all the labour and investment of the experiment in reforestation. Last week when we were making preparations for the first family Christmas tree since the outbreak of the war, we selected a suitable Scotch pine from our own woodlot. As they were planted about five feet apart, there are places where they are crowding and the

AROUND HOME

work of thinning must be done. The little tree was brought home and in due time was properly dressed for the Christmas festivities. But it was not until it was decorated with tinsel, laden with tokens of love and good-will and lit with candles that it dawned on me that this tree was the first fruit of our planting. It was sacrificed to celebrate the first family reunion since the grim separation caused by the war. Surely I planted more wisely than I knew. Even if it were possible for me to live until every tree is fit to be marketed as,

“The mast of some tall amiral.”

I would not be so enriched as I am by this little tree. No tree of the thousands that we planted can ever bring me more happiness than this one. I had no thought of planting Christmas trees, and yet, what better could any man plant? For many years to come there will be Christmas trees, and to spare. My thrifty and foresighted friends, have you any answer to make? Have I not blundered into an investment of happiness that will yield greater dividends than any you can hope for from your mortgages and bonds?

* * * *

Perhaps there are some who will object to a Scotch pine being used as a Christmas tree. It comes of too sturdy a stock for such holiday humours. The forebears of this tree were of the kind that were shaped into torches and quenched with blood to fashion the Fiery Cross. Surely it is

AROUND HOME

losing something of its stern fibre when it is turned to uses so domestic. Do not believe it. The men whose forebears fashioned the Fiery Cross came to Canada and learned the arts of peace. Their children were reared in peaceful homes. Did they lose any of the ancient fibre in these softer surroundings? The answer comes back from all the stricken fields of Europe—from the thronging graves where the battle was fiercest:

“They never receded one foot from the van,
Nor blanched at the ire or the prowess of man.”

And who shall say that it was not their memory of the gentle homes of Canada, with their Christmas trees and simple joyousness, that nerved our heroes to their noblest achievements? They knew what they were fighting for, and it was something of true worth. I take it as a happy omen, that without design or set purpose the first tree of my planting has been used for a Christmas tree. May the others that are growing so lustily have as happy a fate. Instead of being used for the arts of war, may they serve in the fullness of time as rooftrees for happy Canadian homes. There was no thought of money-making when they were planted, and it is good to find that they are yielding their first dividend of happiness. I am content.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

The Open Fire

LAST night something happened that gave me a new slant on the question of education. For the first time we have had an open fire. When the new stoves were put in, owing to the shortage of coal, we got one that is a combination of a stove and a grate. It is supposed to burn wood just as well as coal, but we found, on trying it, that that was a delusion. It wouldn't take a block of wood more than eight inches long, and in order to keep the fuel burning the blower had to be kept in place all the time. The result was that it was no better than an ordinary box stove, and a good deal more bother. But a few days ago we heard that there was cannel coal in the village, and we had a bag-full brought home in the buggy, just to give the stove a trial. I don't think the Fuel Controller will object to our having one bag-full, seeing that we are using wood in all the other stoves. He should let us have that bag-full as a reward for merit, or as a good-conduct prize. Anyway, we got the cannel coal and tried it in our grate. It burned gloriously, and after we had all admired it and warmed ourselves at it, we went about our work as usual.

Late in the evening I was passing through the room which was lit only by the fire from the grate. I stopped to look at it in obedience to some olden impulse and found the littlest boy cuddled in a cor-

AROUND HOME

ner between a table and the wall, with his eyes fixed on the fire. He was evidently absorbed in watching it, and as I did not disturb him he presently began to ask me questions. In the course of the next few minutes he had searched me for all I knew about coal, plumbago, diamonds, charcoal and all other substances of the carbon group. While talking with him I could remember sitting with my own father before an open fireplace and questioning him in the same way. As we sat together, the boy and I, I felt as never before that there must be truth in the theory that civilization grew up around open fires. The first step of progress was when the savage learned to light a fire and keep it going. As time passed they learned to build their fires in sheltered places, and even to build shelters to protect their fires, thus evolving the hut or house. All family councils naturally took place around the open fire, and the children learned the secrets of the chase from the stories told by their elders around the open fire. It seemed to be instinctively right for the little boy to ask questions and learn things while sitting half hypnotized by the glowing coals. That was the way his ancestors to even the remotest period had learned things. As I mulled over these things while sitting in the darkened room looking at the coals, it suddenly struck me that here is something that our educationists have missed. They are all the time trying to apply what they call natural methods in teaching. Why have they never hit on the plan of holding classes around an open fire?

AROUND HOME

They would find the minds of the children receptive and could probably advance their education as in no other way. It is well worth thinking over.

* * * *

Come to think of it, remarks that I have heard lead me to believe that our educational system is grievously in need of some new ideas of this kind. Perhaps if I could get the Minister of Education, the Deputy Minister, the Inspectors and the various heads of departments in a big lonely room around an open fireplace, I might be able to tell them some things that would startle them. As I remember it, most of the ghost stories I have heard were told around open fireplaces and I think I could tell our educationists some ghost stories that would make their flesh creep. I can imagine the scene. They would be sitting on the floor around the open fire with the light dancing on their bright, old faces. The wind would be whistling in the chimney and the shadows in the far corners would be dancing a ghostly dance. Oo-oo-oo!

While they looked up at me with eager eyes I would tell them what parents have to say about the frequent and vexatious change of books which makes it necessary to buy an entire new set for every child who enters our schools. This is a frightful tale and I should like to tell it to them in a way that would raise goose-flesh along their spines. Oo-oo-oo!

Then I would tell them in awe-stricken tones about the Prussian rigidity of the school system and of the effect it has in stifling originality and initia-

AROUND HOME

tive of both teachers and pupils. This is a tale of educational frightfulness that should make their flesh creep. Oo-oo-oo!

I would tell them, in my most creepy manner, about the work that the education system is doing in moving the young people from the farms to the cities. It is failing to interpret and beautify the life of the country so as to satisfy the aspirations and cravings of the young. This is a story that is as tragic as it is ghostly. Oo-oo-oo!

Alas! Alas! At this point the vision fades. A ghostly voice seemed to call to me from the past.

"McArthur, parse. Oo-oo-oo!"

I couldn't parse it or anything else if my life depended on it. And my own flesh creeps as I remember my dreadful experience in trying to learn something about grammar when I went to school. Oo-oo-oo!

Old Home Day

THE Christmas holidays are really our national Old Home Week. No matter how much the story of Christmas may be told in press and pulpit, and no matter how earnestly its lessons may be taught and listened to, the mastering spell of Christmas is the spell of the home. On Christmas Day scattered families are reassembled, cares are put aside and there are feasting and rejoicing that renew the ties of home. Old and young look forward to these reunions, to the surprise of little

AROUND HOME

gifts, to merriment, to fellowship and to kindliness. And this aspect of Christmas is not without its lessons nor without its sacred quality. The home is the true unit of our civilization, and it is well that every year a day—and sometimes a week—should be devoted to renewing the home ties. And it is well that these reunions should be lighthearted and carefree. All through the year life is a struggle—a battle—with unrest and disappointment meeting us at every turn. But these Christmas home-gatherings refresh us and renew our strength so that we can take up our tasks in a happier frame of mind. If we have acted our part bravely through the year, surely we may forget for one day the shadows and miseries that man has brought on himself. So let our Old Home Day be happy. As some poet has sung:

“We all are weary travellers
Upon life’s dusty way;
If any man can play the pipes,
In God’s name let him play.”

Having enjoyed Christmas dinners and Christmas celebrations in both the city and the country and in both the Old Land and the New, I shall venture to make a few remarks on the subject. To begin with, I know of no place where Christmas dinners are so substantial and so lavish as on the farms of Ontario. No matter whether times are hard or good, there are few farms where it is not possible to have a worth-while Christmas dinner. Even though they may not have a turkey or goose of their own raising, there are few who cannot rustle

AROUND HOME

a fat hen or a robust cockerel to grace the table. Though oranges may be lacking, no farmer need be without good apples, home fruits and plenty of vegetables. Even in the days of the McKinley Act there were good Christmas dinners on the farms, for the country was full of food products that were cheap, because there was no market for them. Although I have lived most of my life on an Ontario farm in an ordinary farming district, I have never known cases of actual want, except where prolonged illness incapacitated the breadwinners. Up to the present I have never heard of public subscriptions to provide Christmas dinners for Ontario farmers. There has been discontent, often due to injustice, but there has seldom been actual need. Although this may not be a pleasant theme to raise in the season of festivity, there is a good reason for raising it. In the cities to-day there are thousands whose Christmas dinners will be meagre; others will eat dinners provided by the charitable; but the farmers and their reassembled families will sit down to loaded tables.

* * * *

Lost Articles

WILL some psychologist, sociologist or student of the habits and customs of civilized people please explain the universal prevalence of the belief that when anything is missing—from a

AROUND HOME

baby's Noah's ark to a kitchen range—some sedentary person in the vicinity is sitting on it? When Eve was hunting for her summer furs and couldn't find them, did she ask Adam to get up to see if he was sitting on them? I have been asked to get up when all sorts of things have been missing, from a clawhammer to a feather bed, and, though I have seldom been found to be hiding anything, the custom still prevails. Things will get lost around the place, and naturally people jump to the conclusion that I must be sitting on them. No matter what is lost, I am asked to get up before a search is made anywhere else. My capacity for sitting on things is greatly overestimated. And I have noticed that the same custom prevails in every country I have visited, and in households both high and lowly in all parts of the world. The head of the house is supposed to have an unlimited capacity for sitting on things. The amount of energy that has been wasted in getting up to let folks make sure that one is not sitting on something that has been mislaid or lost would be sufficient to hunt up everything that has ever been lost since the beginning of time. And, in spite of constant disappointments, eager searchers for lost goods still continue, in a hopeful spirit, to make everybody in sight get up whenever they start to hunt for anything. These few remarks are inspired by the fact that I have just been asked to get up to make sure that I am not sitting on a large picture hat with seven long hat-pins sticking through it. The idea.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

Enoch Arden

ENOCH ARDEN has come home again. Right at the beginning I want to explain that Enoch is not a dreamy human sentimentalist. He is a large, full-grown tomcat with the eye of a basilisk and the tread of a panther. I cannot understand why he was called Enoch Arden. The only justification of the name is that he has been away for a long time and was thought to be dead. But when he came back he did not peep through a window and then go away to die of a broken heart because he had been forgotten. No, indeed. He climbed into the stable through a breach made by Fenceviewer II. when she stuck a horn through a pane of glass. Judging from the amount of white fur scattered on the cement floor of the stable, he celebrated his homecoming by beating up Wangus, a large white cat of genial disposition. And apparently when Enoch came in by the window the other cats went out by the door of the hayloft or some other avenue of escape. Anyway, when I went up to the stable in the morning to milk the cows he was in sole possession of the stable. If he was not satisfied with the family arrangements when he got back no one stopped to argue with him. He greeted me with a loud "meow" and rolled over on the floor as if he expected me to tickle him and pet him. Stooping down I felt his fine muscular development, but when I straightened up

[207]

AROUND HOME

he arched his back and spat venomously. At first I thought that he was issuing defiance to one of the other cats, but none was in sight. It was simply a spontaneous outburst of innate cussedness. From his sleek and glossy appearance it is quite evident that Enoch had not been starving on a desert island. It is probable that he has been living on rabbits and big game of that kind. The cold weather probably drove his natural game into hiding and he remembered the skim-milk ration at his old home. I feel sure that it was no touch of natural affection that moved him. He will probably stay with us until the cold snap is over and then resume his free and independent life. Yet it is just possible that something may happen to him. Eggs have disappeared mysteriously, from nests that never before failed us, since the wanderer returned. And there is something about his glossy appearance that suggests an albuminous diet. If these suspicions should prove true I hate to think what will probably happen to Enoch Arden.

* * * *

Feather Clothes

I WONDER what a suit of feathers would cost? Me for the feathers! Yesterday, when the thermometer was registering depression, somewhere about four below, and a thirty-mile gale was driving a smother of snow across the fields, a chickadee came to the lilac bush to get his daily ration of

AROUND HOME

suet, which attentive boys had placed beyond the reach of cats for his benefit. After he had filled his crop with frozen fat, he hopped to a wind-swept twig and began to attend to his toilet. He straightened his tie, picked the grease spots off his vest and smoothed out the lapels of his coat. His whole suit couldn't have contained more material than a tail feather from an ordinary rooster, and yet it enabled him to be out and about in weather conditions that made human beings hug the stoves. Of course suet is rich in calories, and his internal combustion engines and heating apparatus are of a high order of efficiency, but the fact remains that all he had between him and the teeth of the gale was a little fluff of feathers. Wherefore I reason that feathers must have wonderful heat-retaining and cold-repelling properties. They are real aviators' suits that are probably warmer and less cumbersome than the kinds that are now being offered for the use of human high fliers. Surely here is a tip for investigators. Can't someone hit on a plan to make suits out of feathers? Besides adding to the comfort of the world, this use of feathers would probably reduce the high cost of living and poultry-raising would become more profitable if we could shear our hens, turkeys and geese as well as get eggs from them and the materials for fricassees and Christmas dinners. Anyway, that little chickadee seemed mighty comfortable in his winter suit, and I wouldn't mind having one like it.

* * * *

AROUND HOME

The Wood-Pile Again

IT IS surprising to find how much preparation is needed when one has to go to the woods to cut firewood with a crosscut saw. Over a month ago it became evident that our supply of fuel would not see us through the winter. The unrelenting, steady cold weather and the necessity of keeping two stoves going all the time, and three part of the time, made armful after armful disappear in smoke in a most disconcerting way. The woodbox seemed to be emptied by magic. We talked about the need of getting more wood ahead for some weeks before we finally decided to make a start. When we finally felt that we must get busy it was found that the crosscut saw was far from being sharp. It had to be taken to the village to be filed and set. It was forgotten several times, but after about a week it was brought home in excellent shape. The sun was shining on Monday and it was the first day of the week and everything seemed propitious for making a start. But the temperature was below zero, so we waited until the afternoon. About two o'clock we finally made a start. Half of a big maple was up on blocks and ready for the saw. We found the saw keen and dropped off five blocks just to show what we could do when we once got started. It was amazing to find how mild the weather got while we were sawing. I felt

AROUND HOME

like taking off my overcoat, but when I found that my moustache was a block of ice I restrained myself. Having cut enough to prove that the saw was in order, we called it a day and highly resolved to put in a few hours at the job every day until we had enough ahead to carry us into the hot weather. But, alas, Tuesday gave us the coldest, rawest east wind we have had this winter and it brought a snowstorm. It would be nonsense to think of going to work in the woods on such a day. And the signs were not right yesterday, either. And to-day there is something else to do. But we shall not freeze. We have the saw and we have the wood and presently we shall get together under the proper auspices.

* * * *

Up from the bitter east a storm is blown
That makes the night a smothering whiteness!
Winter on his throne
Has veiled his starry brightness,
By the great burden of his clouds undone.
And now the lispings snow-wraiths hurry forth
To build the sculptured drifts.

The morning sun
Will light a scene of magic. Magic of the North!
Where but the strong endure. Where but the
strong
Can raise their voices in exulting song,
And to the music of the silver bells
Keep time,
Too swift for rhyme,
And make defiant harmony that swells
Above the roaring of the wintry blast.
Hark! you may hear them as they hurry past
With shouts and laughter! In their free delight,
Glowing with youth, nor fearing storm nor night.

AROUND HOME

“Snow Stuff”

A WEEK ago there was a four-foot snow-drift (or was it five?)—that lay just outside my window. I predicted that some day the sun would whisper to it, etc., etc. As usual I was all wrong. A couple of mornings ago two well-bundled youngsters walked out on it and surveyed it thoughtfully. They tested it carefully and found it suited to their requirements. Presently the coal shovel was furtively taken from under the base-burner, an old handsaw was found somewhere, and the shaft of an old pruning hook, that served as a straight edge. The next time I looked out an Esquimau igloo was well under way. The wind-packed snow of the drift yielded firm blocks with which it was possible to build walls that would have passed the critical examination of an Innuít building inspector. I was not so crude as to make any remarks or to offer suggestions. I knew that I was thousands of miles away from the Arctic Circle where those building operations were in progress. Captain McClintock—or was it Kane?—and his trusty first mate were building winter quarters. To your unilluminated eyes that building in the distance is perhaps a farmer’s barn. Nothing of the kind! It is the trusty little whaling vessel caught in the ice floe, and all the crew are down with the scurvy. (Before the advent of the Cannery Trust, with

AROUND HOME

canned vegetables, all classic polar expeditions had a dreadful time with the scurvy.) And you, you poor fish, might think that the crease lying across that field out there is the Government drain. Blind! Blind!

That is a crevasse between the ice hummocks, and what looks to you like the end of a log thrown up by a flood is really a seal that has pulled out for a breath of air. Presently his blubber will be spluttering in the stone lamp that will warm the igloo. What you imagine is the Red Cow sunning herself on the lee side of the straw stack and trying to work up energy enough to go and scratch herself on the gatepost, is really a musk ox that in due time shall fall to the trusty rifle of the Captain. What you mistook for Verbena, prowling for swill and cursing the choremaster by her gods, is really a polar bear that will help to stock the larder with fresh meat. That is not Bildad dancing around and barking at the strange proceedings, but Wolfgang, the leader of the faithful dog team. All his fellows have been eaten, and they have even eaten his harness. Those are not hens cackling at the barn, but penguins, and the man who is pensively watching proceedings around the corner of the house is a scout from a tribe of hostile Iluits. The work of this day will be recorded with heroic brevity in the ship's log to be read by the relief expedition that will come too late. Altogether it was a perfect day, and as the igloo was built so high that a step-ladder had to be used inside to get the top blocks in place the winter quarters will be com-

AROUND HOME

modious. When the structure was complete the Arctic explorers made the mistake of coming indoors to boast of their achievement. When it was found that their clothes were not only covered with snow, but had snow rubbed into them and through them by frequent crawling through the tunnelled entrance, there was a commotion. They had to "change every stitch," warm their feet in the oven and drink hot cocoa to ward off the flu. I got mine out of the overflow because I knew what was going on and had done nothing to stop it. But I am prepared to defend myself against criticism, both domestic and public. It was an experiment in sociological, commercial and ethnological geography that can be defended by the most up-to-date educational arguments.

* * * *

But let us look at the matter from another angle. Even the efficiency experts and economists will admit that a reasonable amount of recreative amusement is not only allowable but necessary. Suppose instead of building their own igloo they had gone to a movie show depicting "snow stuff" no one would have objected. Probably the economists would approve because the admission fee would help to enrich the promoters of movie shows—the captains of industry who were recently described by a writer in "The Saturday Evening Post" as "men who look as if they were born with black cigars in their mouths and discussing money in low, passionate voices." Their igloo might be condemned as coming under the Law of Conspicuous Waste, because

AROUND HOME

it yielded no cash returns. But what of that? They developed their imaginations and powers of initiative and learned more, in a practical way, about the life of the Esquimaux and the trials of Arctic explorers than they could by attending the most vivid movies of polar scenes, by reading books or by attending a lecture by the suave and imaginative Dr. Cook. And I am willing to wager a large edible icicle that no two boys ever came out of a movie show with such glowing faces and tingling bodies as they had when they crawled out of their tunnel. If I were going to start a campaign against wasted effort I could name a dozen enterprizes that divert human energy into channels less useful than the boys' igloo, which will disappear in the next thaw. As a matter of fact, I approved of it so much that I had it photographed.

Shinny

WHILE recalling old times and overawing the younger generation with tales of bygone prowess and endurance is one of our most pleasant pastimes, it should be indulged in with caution. Sometimes our reminiscences, like curses and chickens, come home to roost. There is the subject of shinny, for instance. It was the "roaring game" of the countryside from forty to fifty years ago. When in an expansive humour, I can still show honourable scars acquired in battles with the

AROUND HOME

shinny stick. Even in those days we heard of city folks who played shinny on the ice, but it was looked on as a girl's game. We made our own shinny clubs, and instead of a rubber puck we used blocks of wood. I remember one game that was played with a knob of cherry wood, the size of a croquet ball, that had been cut from the top of an old four-poster bedstead. I also remember being put to sleep by the impact of that ball at the base of the skull. From this you can see the kind of reminiscences I have been indulging in, and can guess how they came back at me when I urged that a proposed hockey game be cancelled last Saturday. My arguments were helped by drifting snow and a falling thermometer, but at noon the sun came out. What could I, who had played shinny, continue to say against the comparatively mild game of hockey? I shinnied on my own side as long as I could, and then gave in. But the experience of age was justified. The ice was covered with snow, and when the "Gore Midgets" got home after a five-mile drive at four below zero, with a stiff east wind blowing, they were a penitent lot. To cap all, they had been defeated. It took an hour, with hot drinks and warm blankets and hot water bottles, to thaw them out, but to-day the hockey fever is at full height again. There is to be a game of league hockey in the village rink to-night, and a seven-mile drive is a mere nothing. If I had done less talking about old-time shinny, I might be able to exercise my authority with more dignity and decision.

* * * *

Marcus Cato, Farmer

NOT being able to do anything towards the work of production just now, beyond carrying an occasional pail of swill to that thankless creature, Beatrice, I have been browsing among books, in the hope of finding something that would tend to make farming more attractive to those who must come to it in the near future. In Thoreau's essay on "The Bean-field" I found this striking sentence: "Cato says that the profits of agriculture are particularly pious or just (*maximeque pius quaestus*)."

That struck me as a new point of view, so I hunted up Plutarch in order to get the ripest thought of that distinguished farmer, Marcus Cato. After reading a list of the virtues of the pompous old skin-flint I struck this illuminating remark: "Nor did he ever buy a slave for above fifteen hundred drachmas; as he did not seek for effeminate and handsome ones, but able, sturdy horse-keepers and cow-herds: and those he thought ought to be sold again, when they grew old, and no useless servant fed in the house."

There was efficiency with a vengeance, but did you get the real point? Cato did his farming by using the labour of slaves. He was an agricultural captain of industry, and the real farmers were part of the live stock. I know quite a number of men who would go back to the land on that basis, and live pious lives. But the world has moved since the

AROUND HOME

time of Cato Censor, and if he were reincarnated to-day he would probably be waited on by a delegation from the United Farmers, who would proceed to tell him some things. Still, it will not do to be too hard on him. He was no worse than many another old-timer whose fame has come clumping down the ages, but whose conduct would not stand the light of modern investigation. And he said at least one good thing. It seems that Cato was Food Controller of Rome, and on one occasion he boiled over with this exasperated epigram: "It is a difficult task, O citizens, to make speeches to the belly, which has no ears."

Thoreau has another sentence which suggests possibilities. "Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least, that husbandry was once a sacred art." With so many clergymen and college professors taking up farming in their spare time, who knows but farming may once more come to its own. Certainly it has made a great advance since the time of Cato, when farmers were all slaves. Perhaps the greatest change made by modern civilization is shown in the improved conditions of farming. In the brave days of old, when a man was moved by the back-to-the-land yearning, he bought an estate and the farmers went with the land. Now that the idea of freedom and equality has penetrated to every class of society we know that the rights of the farmer are just as inviolable as those of any other man, though we have not quite managed to put the idea into practice. The latest developments of the war have shown that farming is the most important

AROUND HOME

industry in the world, and as we have had three generations of compulsory education, it is just possible that when the storms roll over we shall find that the most important industry has taken the most important place. If the farmers organize and compel their rights to be respected the best brains of the world will be directed towards farming and in time it may become as sacred to us as money-making is now. In any case it is certain that many people who consider themselves as wise and sententious as Cato will have to take up farming, and it will be a great shock to them to find that living piously on a farm is an altogether different thing to what it was in the days of Imperial Rome.

Barnyard Gossip

SOCRATES has suddenly projected himself into the limelight. After two years of quiet and in-offensive life he has jumped to the centre of the stage and registered defiance. Lamb and sheep, he has lived peacefully in the fields and about the buildings without attracting undue attention to himself. But now he is a menace to be reckoned with by anyone who goes to do chores or to pass through the barnyard. His first outbreak occurred a couple of days ago. Some unidentified person had left a gate open and the sheep came into the garden, where they nibbled at the rose bushes and little trees. As usual, I had to drive them out, and

AROUND HOME

as the day was cold, I tried to hurry them. In doing this I must have offended the personal dignity of Socrates. He was the last one in the flock headed toward the gate and I am not sure but I urged him along somewhat with the toe of my boot. But I am not clear on this point. Things happened so rapidly during the next few seconds that I have forgotten just how the trouble started. But I remember that the sedate Socrates suddenly jumped forward, whirled in his tracks with the nimbleness of a lamb, and launched himself straight at my waistband. Instinctively I side-stepped and slanted him off by placing the sole of my boot against his shoulder. He registered disappointment, shook his heavy head a couple of times, then trotted along to rejoin the flock. Since then I have seen a boy going around the corner of the stable at the speed limit, with Socrates about two jumps behind. Evidently he has discovered how to use his head and means to be master of the place. But I doubt if he will ever attain the proficiency of the old butters we used to have in the days when sheep might almost be called predatory animals. He is too well bred. Socrates, moreover, is his really-truly name, and it is duly registered. He has near relatives among the most famous prize-winners. The kind of conduct he is developing is unworthy of a sheep of his aristocratic standing. But it looks as if he would add a new interest to the chores during the cold weather.

* * * *

Besides being a general nuisance, Mungo, the

AROUND HOME

yearling steer, is a philosopher. When he was at large he considered himself master of the farm and helped himself. Fences meant nothing to him. He could bend down new ones as well as break old ones. Even a barbed wire along the top made no difference. He was smooth enough to overcome that difficulty. So it gradually became evident that we must fatten Mungo for Easter beef or arrange to put new fences on the farm in the spring. I thought that when this freedom-loving nuisance came to be tied in a stall there would be trouble. But I was entirely wrong. The philosophical side of his nature developed at once. Being tied up, he realized that he must be waited on, and settled down to take life easy. In fact, he lies down and never gets up except when he is indignantly kicked or poked up because he must go out to get a drink or to have his stall bedded. When not disturbed he eats his meals lying down. He doesn't care much for cornstalks. Good alfalfa hay suits him, and mangels and chopped feed. He will lie and munch as long as they are before him. Of course, he eats standing up at times. But that is because when he has been forced to get up he is too lazy to lie down again. Let no one imagine that his laziness is due to some ailment. He is a picture of health. Juno would be flattered to have her eyes compared with his, and his hair is getting sleek and glossy. If he keeps on laying on fat he will make a decent showing in the Easter beef market, but in the meantime he is not letting anything worry him. I cannot remember when I have heard him bawling

AROUND HOME

as if he wanted anything. A full manger and a wide stall in which to sprawl at ease is his ideal of life.

* * * *

Fenceviewer II., eldest daughter of the Red Cow, is carrying on the traditions of her family and adding to "the glories of her blood and state." She has shown a new trick of bovine resourcefulness that surpasses anything done by her mother, of exasperating memory. A few days ago she and the rest of the cattle were found almost piled up on one another as they crowded around the feed-bin and helped themselves. As the two doors that guarded this bin are provided with proper hooks and staples, it was assumed at once that some absent-minded person had carelessly left the two doors open. But on the following day they were found helping themselves again, and everyone was so sure that the doors had been closed properly that a watch was set on the cattle to see if one of them had learned the trick of unhooking the latch with her horn. The explanation was even more unusual than that. When Fenceviewer II. thought she was safe from detection she walked up to the door and lifted the hook with a lick of her tongue. She opened that door as easily as a human being could do it with his hand. While I know that cows have long, prehensile tongues that they use skillfully in licking ears of corn out of the corn-crib, I never heard of one that used her tongue for such a trick as this. It argues unusual intelligence to have

AROUND HOME

her open a door in this way, and it is quite evident that she opened the two doors that led to the feed-bin. Of course, we had to fix things so that she cannot do the trick any more, but really I am rather proud of her. Other people may have cows that are bred for butterfat, or flow of milk, or beef, but Fenceviewer II. is in a class by herself. She is the right kind of cow for an amateur farmer. Her strain can find for themselves if their rations are not looked after properly. I am not sure but I should develop the breed and put it on the market.

* * * *

A Wonder Day

AFTER this an artist may do whatever he likes in the way of mixing up the sun, moon and stars, and I shall not offer a word of criticism. Last Saturday we had a morning of winter magic when all things seemed possible. At dawn a little wisp of the waning moon hung in the eastern sky, with a great blazing star a little distance in front of the two horns. The moon seemed to be floating as near as a piece of cloud, while the star was immeasurably far away. Presently the sun began to push over the horizon, a huge blob of blood. Although there was no cloud in the sky the rim of the sun appeared to be flat, as if a slice had been cut off. It swung up over the tree tops, and then we saw the

[223]

AROUND HOME

sun, moon and the big star all blazing in the sky at the same time. The moon and star were not more than seventy degrees higher than the sun. And while these wonders were apparent in the sky the earth was more wonderful. During the night a heavy hoarfrost had formed on everything. Every twig and branch of the orchard and forest trees was encrusted with white crystals. Every blade of grass and weed that showed through the snow was similarly jewelled. When the sunlight struck the hoarfrost everything began to shine and sparkle. The trees seemed to have lights hanging in them, and the snowy fields gave back the light as if they had been sown with diamonds. While the sun was low there were long shadows that were transparently blue. The blue of the sky seemed to be lying in pools on the snow. The world was a study of white and blue and jewels, with the trunks of trees showing grey. Passing trains, that made a surprising roar in the still air, left long windrows of white smoke that floated with an air drift from the west. The frost-covered telephone wires along the sideroad and concession-lines lay like white ribbons against the distant woodlots. A cutter went by with a musical jingling of bells and gave the last touch of old-fashioned winter to the magic scene. And all the while the moon and the great star continued to hang in the sunlit sky. They were visible at ten o'clock, when the sun was shining with its full power. Possibly they remained visible much longer, but something distracted my attention and I did not look for them again. When a light wind

AROUND HOME

arose the hoarfrost began to sift from the trees in large flakes and gave the effect of a snowstorm with the sun shining. Altogether it was about the most beautiful and amazing winter day I have ever enjoyed.

Kindling Wood

WILL the supply of old boards ever run out? This is becoming an urgent question. Since the memory of man runneth, old boards have been the ideal material for kindling wood, and where a wood fire is used kindling is a constant necessity. It is needed for lighting the fire in the morning, for the custom of covering the fire (see curfew) belongs to the ancient period of large fireplaces and abundant supplies of coal and ashes. Covering the fire so as to keep a supply of live coals for use in the morning was quite an art, and it cannot be practised successfully in these modern stoves with small fire-boxes. So we must have kindling. Moreover, when a "quick oven" is needed to cook a cake, a batch of pies or a melting Johnny-cake an armful of kindling is always demanded so as to make a hot blaze. And a well-seasoned board that can be split into splinters is ideal for this purpose. But I am beginning to fear that some day the supply will run out. Boards are getting "scarce and high." In the old days when the farm was fenced with boards

AROUND HOME

they were plentiful, for those that got broken or badly warped were removed every spring and replaced by new ones. This kept a constant supply of material for kindling wood on the place. Then there would be patching to do on the shingle roofs that would release shingles for this purpose. An old lean-to or a pigpen or a henhouse that had outlived its usefulness would also replenish the supply from time to time. And the result of this is that when I am asked for an armful of kindling in a hurry I yield to the established habit and hunt up an old board for the sacrifice. Recently this has entailed more searching than I care to devote to the work, and I am wondering what we shall do when the era of wire fences and cement and corrugated iron outbuildings, with asbestos roofing material, is finally established. We shall be entirely without old boards for kindling.

* * * *

In my hot youth when it was one of my special chores to get up and light the fires on wintry mornings, I gave much earnest thought to kindling wood and substitutes for it. I remember a recipe that was given in Dr. Chase's Family Recipe Book, which indicates that kindlings were an important part of household economy from the earliest times. I forget the proper proportions to use, but Dr. Chase's most highly recommended kindling material was made from a mixture of resin (then known locally as "rossum"), tallow and sawdust. The resin and tallow were melted together and then

AROUND HOME

the sawdust was stirred in until the mixture was stiff. When it cooled sufficiently it was moulded into balls in the palms of the hands. I made an experimental batch of this kindling and my chief recollection of it is that I almost froze to death trying to get a ball lighted with an old-fashioned sulphur match. On the whole, nice long pine shavings, slithered from a cast-off pine scantling gave the most satisfactory kindlings. At the present time I find tightly-twisted newspapers that have been treated with a splash of Mr. Rockefeller's highly combustible fluid very serviceable in lighting the morning fire. But, of course, twisted papers will not do when there is a rich Johnny-cake in progress. Then we must have a board or at least a precious fragment of an old rail. And of late the search for this kind of desirable material has been so strenuous that it has taken much of the joy out of joy-farming.

* * * *

Of course we keep sufficiently in step with progress to use coal stoves for heating purposes, and I hear rumours of an approach of the Hydro-electric, with possibilities of the use of electricity for minor cooking; but the recent coal shortage inclines me to cling to wood as a reserve of fuel. Also I read the papers—at least the headlines—before twisting them up for kindling, and I have learned something about Labour going on strike and Capital going on the blink at critical times and cutting off the heating and cooking supplies of power.

AROUND HOME

This also increases my interest in the conservation of the wood-lot. It is dependable, if old-fashioned, and even if the supply of old boards and old rails for kindling finally runs out, one can worry along with finely-split heart wood that has been properly seasoned. Coal, electricity, gas and coal oil are all useful enough, but modern economic conditions make the supply uncertain. It does not seem wise to allow ourselves to become wholly dependent on the strongly-asserted rights of Labour organizations and organized Capital. If we do we may some day find ourselves with empty coal-bins and oil-tanks and with gas jets that give no stream of gas and push-buttons to which the "juice" refuses to respond. The good, wholesome, independent civilization that existed before the present inter-dependent variety, grew up around wood fires, and it is, perhaps, possible that after Labour has gone out on its last big strike and Capital on its last big blink we may be glad to find in backward districts the kindlings of that leisurely civilization we are now so intent on throwing on the scrap-heap of time.

AROUND HOME

Winter Work

AT different times I have complained about the monotony of doing chores, of doing the same thing day in and day out, morning, noon, and night. Well, I have no kick coming on that score just now. The chores have suddenly developed an infinite variety. The up-to-date, scientific farmer may find chores monotonous because he has everything just right and as he does most of his work indoors the changes of the weather do not bother him. With the backward farmer and the amateur back-to-the-lander the case is different. Things are bound to happen at the most inconvenient times that tax his ingenuity to the utmost. Everything was running quite smoothly with me until the rain came last week, but one morning when I went out to feed the cattle I found the cornstack and the haystack coated with ice and the wet fodder frozen hard. It took me about an hour of hard work with an axe and a fork to uncover enough dry food for the animals. That gave a spice of variety to my work even if it did not make it easier. To make matters worse I had got down to the butts of my stacks and all around them there was an accumulation of snow that had been changed into ice by the rain and frost. This meant that the ends of all the corn sheaves were frozen in solid and had to be chopped out and the haystack was so locked up that I found it hard

AROUND HOME

to tear loose the hay in the middle. Of course all this fodder should be under cover so as to save waste and extra work, but there is something to be said in defence of my kind of farming. I know many men who have to work harder than I had to work at those stacks, not for a few weeks during the rough weather but all year round, because they have put large, automatic mortgages on their farms in order to have good barns and the latest make of implements. I prefer wrestling with a frozen stack once in a while to grappling constantly with a ravenous mortgage.

* * *

My whole difficulty is not with the problem of feeding, however. Cleaning out the stables in the old-fashioned way now requires some mature thought. At this season of the year it is sometimes hard to keep the manure pile from cutting off all approach to the stable. On cold days, when the cattle are standing out shivering while their stalls are being cleaned, a fellow gets in a hurry and empties his wheelbarrow in the handiest place, with the result that presently no place is handy. Then a snowstorm comes along and drifts into the space that was kept clear around the door and the door is almost wrenched off its hinges in the attempt to force it open. Of course one always intends to shovel the snow away but before he can get time to do the job the cattle tramp down the snow and it is left where it is. Then another snowstorm comes from another angle and leaves a new drift

AROUND HOME

that is in the way. I assure you it takes a lot of engineering skill to keep a right of way open for the wheelbarrow in weather such as we have been having. And it is no little trick to wheel a loaded barrow up a narrow board so as to dump it over the top of the pile. There are times when I think there was some sound sense in the exclamation of the boss who retorted angrily to the navvy who wanted to be promoted from the shovellers to the wheelbarrow gang. "So you want to run a wheelbarrow, do you? Now tell me what the devil do you know about machinery?" That old joke reminds me that a frivolous correspondent has asked my opinion of the theory that it was the wheelbarrow that first taught the Irishman to walk on his hind legs. Irish readers will please note that this gibe did not originate with me but with a big two-fisted man whose name and address I will furnish on request to anyone who wishes to debate the point with him. He is a man whose name has appeared more than once "among those present" in free fights, and I think he could put up a very pretty argument.

The Clothesline

THERE is bitter need of a new law—a law with hooks on it. It should be promulgated with all the hifalutin of legislative authority that whenever a clothesline is about to be moved to another part of the lawn the fact should be advertised in the “Public Gazette,” two daily papers, “The Farmer’s Sun,” all weekly papers and the telephone book. For at least a week before the change is made the matter should be the theme of intensive neighbourhood gossip, by telephone and house-to-house visitation. And if these precautions are neglected the law should provide for a scale of properly graduated misdemeanors and offenses, for which indictments would lie against the owner of the clothesline. To have a clothesline knock off the hat of an unsuspecting citizen should be regarded as assault and battery, aggravated by personal humiliation and acute mental anguish. To have the line hook under a man’s nose should rank as mayhem and tort, with grievous bodily harm. To have it catch him under the chin should be a high crime and misdemeanor, calling for condign punishment and exemplary damages. My legal terminology may be somewhat twisted, but you get me. Your wire clothesline, when encountered in the dark of the moon, is the “fearfullest wild-fowl” known. If met with at a brisk gait, it is liable to

AROUND HOME

jerk a man from his roots. Many are the tales told in the country about midnight wrestlings with clotheslines. Lovers with their heads in the air have had their dignity wrecked when approaching the home of the beloved, or have had their happiness shattered by encountering it just after the fond farewells on the doorstep. Taking it for all in all, the clothesline should have a special paddock for itself, like other dangerous farm creatures. The meaning of all this is that our clothesline was moved to a new place a couple of weeks ago, and forgetful members of the family and unsuspecting visitors are being rudely jerked into a recognition of the fact.

In Praise of Hickory Nuts

THE Canadian hickory nut I sing! It may have a hard shell that resists the ordinary nut-cracker and you may find it hard to get at the precious kernel without mashing a thumb or mashing the nut into a mess of kernel and shell, but if you have the skill to get the meat to your teeth and then pass it luxuriously along your palate you will find that it surpasses all praise. No nut of the lot, from the lofty cocoanut that matures like the Stylite, high in the air, to the lowly peanut—"The mute companion of the murky mole"—can compare with it in deliciousness of flavour. The nuts of other

AROUND HOME

lands may be easy to get at, but the best flavoured Canadian nuts—the walnut, butternut and hickory nut—are at the bottom of that popular phrase, “A hard nut to crack.” Some of them would almost defy a safebreaker or yeggman. Nature has protected their treasures with a worthy shell. To crack them properly requires no ordinary skill. You must hold them on end and then deal them a sharp stroke that is still as delicately adjusted as the stroke of those huge steam hammers that can be made to crack an eggshell with a blow of twenty—or is it a hundred—tons. If you hit too hard you will make both the nut and your fingers a total loss, but with the right blow the shell will crack and come apart so that the meat can be picked out in pieces that give the palate something to rejoice over. This morning I came along when some hickory nuts were being cracked and helped myself. At once I was back in imagination on the hearth of an old open fireplace, cracking hickory nuts on the granite hearthstone with a corner of the family smoothing-iron and then picking out the meat with the family darning needle. I was glad to find that a well-seasoned hickory nut tastes just as good today as it did in those far days. When people say that bacon tastes as “sweet as a nut” they do not mean that it is in any way saccharine. They mean that its flavour reminds them of the perfect flavour of our native Canadian hickory nut. I am glad that most of our Christmas supply of nuts is of home picking, for I know that, besides the pleasure of eating them,

AROUND HOME

they carry memories of picking them on perfect autumn days. Among my most precious memories are memories of days spent in the mellow autumn woods gathering our own native nuts. The imported nuts that are bought in grocery stores have no such glamour attending them. They may be easier to deal with and better for cooking and candy purposes, but for me there is more in one taste of a hickory nut than in a bushel of the commercial nuts. The hickory nut rouses my imagination and teases my appetite. I know that if I tried to make a meal of them I would probably starve to death while labouriously cracking them and picking out the meat. But I would get exercise and at the same time renew my youth. Wherefore I most inadequately sing the Canadian hard-shelled hickory nut.

Churning

THERE'S no use talking about it, the churning should always be done on Saturday when the children are at home from school. I have always thought so, and now I am sure of it. This forenoon I had to churn, and it came near being my afternoon job as well. When I was away from home the churn thermometer was mysteriously broken, and it is hard to get a new one. The thermometer we use to keep tabs on the weather has a plush back, so I couldn't dip it into the cream. The

AROUND HOME

result was that the churning had to be done "by guess and by gosh," and the performance was not a success. There was no way of finding out the temperature of the cream. As the day is chilly I thought it must be too cool, so, after making the barrel churn spin and splash for a while, I began adding hot water. Still it wouldn't break. It wouldn't even bend. Finally someone came along, squinted into the churn, and told me that I had the cream so warm that the butter-fat was too oily to gather. For the next half hour I cautiously splashed cold water into it and kept the churn spinning. But if a churn was ever bewitched that one was. It must have been overlooked by Puck, who has been known to

"Sometimes labour in the quern

And bootless make the breathless housewife churn."

But, having started, I was bound to finish the job, and kept right on treading power under the churn. I started at 10 o'clock and was still going strong at noon. Then an experienced butter-maker came along—one whose experience dated back to the time before people got so scientific as to use thermometers. I was offered the cold comfort that in the dark past churns sometimes went wrong, and that after churning for three days the people had to give up in despair. Quite evidently my churn had gone wrong. Like jelly that wouldn't jell, or politics that wouldn't poll, my batch of butter wouldn't butt. At last I sent over and borrowed a thermometer from a neighbour, and found that I had

AROUND HOME

been working with a cream somewhere about 40. After it was coaxed up a trifle above 60 I went at it again, but by this time it was sulking, and it took another half hour to make the butter come. When it finally did come it had a pale, overworked look, and appeared to be ready for the rest cure. However, I got the butter by my persistence, and that was some satisfaction. But two rules were born of the struggle, that will be enforced as inflexibly as the laws of the Medes and the Persians. No more churnings will be undertaken without a thermometer handy to test the temperature, and the churning will be done on Saturday—unless the children happen to be home on some other day of the week. I have had enough.

Technical Education

EVERYONE cannot afford to send his boys to a technical school where they will learn the use of tools, so it is interesting to have found a way by which they can acquire this useful knowledge at home. More than that, they can learn to use the haphazard kind of tools that are usually found in average homes. Quite accidentally I discovered a method of self-education for boys that I propose to pass along, if not for the guidance of the Department of Education, at least for the guidance of the ordinary citizen. For the past couple of years

AROUND HOME

there has been on the farm a discarded bicycle that one was always stumbling over in unexpected corners where it would be placed to get it out of the way. It was regarded as a total loss, and pocket money and earnings were accumulating toward the purchase of a new bicycle. One day I was asked if the wreck might be sold. Someone who felt competent to patch it up had offered five dollars. I authorized the sale, but before it happened I was asked for a trifle of assistance. The wheels were so badly warped that it was thought advisable to get them straightened a little before the purchaser would see them, for fear he would change his mind. I was asked if soaking them in a tub of water would make it possible to straighten the twisted felloes. As it was a rainy day and there was nothing else to do I examined the wheels carefully, and the examination led me to suspect that the condition of the wheels was due to the fact that a number of the spokes were out of place.

In accidents of the past spokes had been knocked out and the previous owners of the wheel had put in new spokes and had not put them in properly. We decided to try what would be the effect of taking out the misplaced spokes and putting them in their proper places. As suspected, this relieved the unequal strain on the felloes, and it was easy to make them as true as they were when they left the factory.

* * *

Then the fun began. The boys saw the possibil-

AROUND HOME

ity of saving the price of a new bicycle—no small matter in these days of high prices. With such wrenches as they could find on the place they took the wheel apart, cleaned the bearings, and found out everything that was the matter with it. It was necessary to buy a few parts that were broken or worn out, but on the whole it was found that they had all the material for a practical bicycle. Gradually the lawn began to look like a machine shop. One was liable to step on a wrench, hammer, cold chisel or other tool at every step. The machine was taken apart and put together at least a dozen times. Inner tubes and tires were carefully patched, and presently people who crossed the lawns had to keep a wary lookout for trial bursts of speed. A broken pedal that had been pronounced a total loss by a local mechanic who was consulted was skilfully repaired by the use of a bolt with two nuts that was secured at the hardware store. The metal pedal was replaced by a block of seasoned maple.

After much repairing and overhauling that kept two boys intensely interested and occupied in their spare time for several weeks the discarded bicycle was brought to such a state of efficiency that all speed records to the village and back were broken over and over again. I was triumphantly assured that it was the lightest-running bicycle in the neighbourhood, and that it would not be sold for five times the price that had been offered for it. In fact, it was not for sale at all. The boys were as proud of it as if they had made it themselves, and

[239]

AROUND HOME

they knew every part of it from the most deeply-hidden ball-bearing to the handle bars. They knew the purpose of every screw, nut and every part, and if anything went wrong they could diagnose the trouble instantly and deal with it in an expert way. While fixing up the bicycle they had learned to use effectively wrenches, pincers, a cold chisel, file, a brace and bits, saw, hammer and square, and the materials for patching tubes. Best of all, like Kipling's ideal man, they learned when things are broken to "stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools."

I suspect that if they had been in a technical school they would have had the very best of tools and appliances and would have learned to rely on just that kind of aid. But most of the things we do in this life must be done with inadequate tools, and the sooner we learn to do what must be done with the instruments at hand the better for us. To provide an adequate technical training I strongly commend a bicycle for the training of embryo speed maniacs.

AROUND HOME

Water^{*}

YES, I have had an operation—that's that! Most writing people when they have an operation nowadays turn it into copy. I am not wishing to be thought eccentric, so I shall do the same. It took this journey into the Valley of the Shadow to make me discover the finest idea that has ever come my way as a journalist. Perhaps it was because I was having my struggle at the time that the O.T.A.'s and the Moderationists were having theirs—anyway, I saw the mistake that the Prohibitionists have made all the way down the ages, and help is going to be offered to them from an unexpected and still impenitent quarter.

Many years ago "The New York Sun" remarked that the great weakness of the prohibition movement is that it offers no attractive substitute for what it takes away. The mistake of "The Sun" was just as foolish as the mistake of the Prohibitionists.

When you have been racked by pain you realize that the best beverage on earth is WATER.

After my imagination had been weaving "arabesques of pain" for hours, some one asked me what I would like to drink. A foolish spirit made me answer, "A John Collins." And I wanted them to

*This article was dictated in the hospital two days before Peter McArthur's death.

AROUND HOME

bring me one that was made in a tub, and one that I could stick my head right in when I wanted a drink. They brought me such a Collins as you would expect to get in a hospital—and it came back as fast as it went down.

* * * *

It was then that it dawned on me that what I wanted was Water—WATER. I began making inquiries about the water supply of the hospital when I would finally be turned loose. My imagination gave me pictures of the River Nile when the parched sands whispered to the inflowing waters of the reviving spring. I knew then that the love of pure water was older than Egypt—older than anything on which we build our lives of civilization. Men and water must have something in them that is synchronous. The water-bearer of the old Zodiac must have been truly ensymboled.

I wanted water, cold water, and I was told that I must wait at least twenty-four hours. I could put in the spare time thinking out just what I would like in the way of water. I will not arouse jealousy among the purveyors of table waters by mentioning those that I thought of first, but I will mention something that is very important—a matter about which I hope to make a campaign later on.

* * * *

It is a most regrettable fact that most of the patrons of these table waters want the charged varieties. They do not know the sheer delight of

AROUND HOME

still waters. No grocery or hotel will supply me with any except the aerated varieties, but I kept pestering the doctors for something especially fine in the way of water, and they promised unhesitatingly to stir heaven and earth—and Toronto—to get the purest table water for me that could be secured. And some time along in the dreary night one of the tubes in my throat began to carry a water of the most marvellous cheer and sweetness. It was not flavoured. It was purely a natural water, and it was chilled to an exactness not to be surpassed in the most exclusive club. As I felt my system slowly becoming saturated with this wonder water I found courage to ask them: "I hope it will not be too expensive to buy, because I feel in the future years I cannot live without it."

It was London City Water! chilled to a nicety.

As I remember things mostly in pictures, it was not long until I found the picture of myself taking the finest drink of water I ever enjoyed. The picture was easy to recognize. It could not compare with the great fountains pictured by great artists. It was very homelike. It was located at the line fence of our own woodlot. I was stretched out at full length on a snowbank, drinking from the pure ice water that gurgled up through the snow before me.

When I realized that the finest drink of water I had ever had was on the home farm, I saw another wonderful thing. For a couple of months each spring we had running to waste at the rate of a gallon a second the finest water I have ever known—

AROUND HOME

at least, the one that makes the most appeal to my palate. If I get off this bed of stupour I hope to buy a little bottling machine, and every spring we shall bottle enough of that water to carry us through the summer for table use. We could easily have an ice plant, and ice this water to the right temperature and offer it to friends and visitors.

* * * *

And that raises another point. How few people know how to serve water! My Prohibitionist friends tell me they have good water, and let me drink it from a tin cup kept hanging to a mossy pump. If they were going to offer me a sweet, stale ginger ale or soft drink they would probably offer it in cut-glass, or at least in a pleasant pitcher. Only crystal-pure water should be served in crystal, and the epicure who could gather water worthy to be served in crystal would well deserve to be made immortal in song. If our friends the Prohibitionists will teach the children—and will learn themselves—how delicious pure water is, and to avoid messy substitutes, they will not only help to bring about a water-drinking world, but they will spread health and open the doors to better living.

AROUND HOME

The Home Dream

FORTH from the loneliness of God,
Who uncompanied reigns,
There came a dream that they have missed
Who build Him lordly fanes.
He dreamed a garden where should dwell
His children innocent,
Where he might walk at eventide
And share in their content;
And they who in the ancient wood
The joy of building knew,
Without a thought but thoughts of home
Have made his dreams come true.

* * *

I

In all the world of dreams but one
Is worth the heart's desire,
A sheltering roof, a table spread,
A place beside the fire;
A home where little children play,
Where age in love may cease,
And down the years the soul of man
Has dreamed this dream of peace.
The oldest dream in all the world
In every age is new—
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

AROUND HOME

II

This dream was launched when Time began
And all its beauty share—
The bird within its summer nest,
The wild beast in its lair.
The savage mother in her cave
Made shelter for her child
And with the dawning of the dream
Her hours of fear beguiled,
Till in her darkened mind its light
To hope and wonder grew—
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

III

The sailor blown about the world,
From Tyre, or but today,
Forever follows with the wind
The selfsame dream away:
A harbour snug where ships may ride
And put to sea no more,
A little cot with far brought spoil
And children at the door.
He wakens when the storm is loud
And dreams the sea night through,
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

IV

The soldier who went forth to war,
Nor knew why war should be,
Beside his camp-fire dreaming saw
A homeland wide and free;

AROUND HOME

A land where war should never come,
Nor wrong nor armed pride
And dreamed with yearning heart of one
To nestle at his side,
And in the thick of blood and strife
There rose before his view
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

V

To follow dreams I took my way
Upon the paths of men,
And after hard and bitter years
I am come home again.
I saw their fate who seek for fame
Or grasp at wealth or power,
But none of these could fill my heart
Or yield a happy hour,
And now beside a sunlit wall
I dream the long day through,
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

VI

The lords of men, where'er they are,
On thrones or tented fields,
Or in the mart where plundered gold
Its cruel glamour yields,
All have their hours of weariness
When naught will satisfy,
And then beyond the Fear and Hate
There rises to the eye

AROUND HOME

A dream of some deep sheltered vale,
Where flowers their petals strew—
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

VII

When man and maid are one in heart,
And hand in hand would go,
Where'er they turn their eyes can see
The guiding vision glow,
And whether fated to a throne,
Or to a toilsome lot,
Whether a palace lies before
Or but a humble cot,
They see the goal the sordid miss,
That love can still renew—
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

VIII

Where toiled our fathers without hope
This dream before them passed,
They rose and followed where it led,
Heart hungry but aghast!
Yet Ocean could not stay their march,
Nor storms that guard the shore,
Nor Death that took such cruel toll
While moved this dream before;
And to the wilderness they came,
Where rested in their view,
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

AROUND HOME

IX

With Cold and Hunger for their part
Through years of bitter toil
They swept the forest from the earth
And tilled the kindly soil.
They builded humbly, as was fit,
A homeland richly blest,
And on the field that they had won
They laid them down to rest,
And at their graves, where'er they lie,
With eyes illumed I view
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

X

Alas that some have gone astray
And built in Power and Pride,
And spent so vainly all the hour
That we may here abide.
You cannot buy, nor yet command,
What love alone can build,
Nor know the wealth of harvest, save
From fields yourself have tilled.
The cunning only win to lose,
And all in vain they woo
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

XI

Though clouds may lower and blind the sun,
Though smoke of Hell may rise,
Nor Death nor any other power
Can hide it from our eyes.

AROUND HOME

The toiler in the whirling mill,
Or in the burrowed mine,
And men where'er they toil or fare,
Still see the vision shine.
Upon the parched and weary heart
It sheds a blessed dew—
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

XII

So take no heed of Time or Fate,
Or evils that befall;
The little dream of Peace and Love
Will conquer over all.
Empires may rise and pass away
And thrones to dust be hurled,
But until God recalls his Dream
Its light will light the world.
As old as Time, as fresh as dawn,
To every mortal new—
The old dream, the home dream,
The little dream come true.

"AROUND HOME," as written by Peter
McArthur, with an Introduction by
M. O. Hammond, and Decorations by
C. W. Jefferys, A.R.C.A., has been produced
in Canada, for the Musson Book
Company, Ltd., Toronto, by
Messrs. Warwick Bros.
& Rutter, Limited,
Toronto

Date Due

~~AUG 10 1971~~

JAN - 5 1972

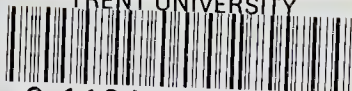


CAT. NO. 23 233

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Autumn

TRENT UNIVERSITY



0 1164 0022585 4

S521 .M14 1925

McArthur, Peter
Around home

DATE

ISSUED TO
151198

~~AUG 10 1971~~

151198

Winter

